**DOCTORAL THESIS**

# The construction of teachers with specific learning differences (SpLDs) as subjects in the English Further Education sector

## an exploration of the contribution of policy techniques, policy process and performativity.

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# The construction of teachers with specific learning differences (SpLD) as subjects in the English Further Education sector: an exploration of the contribution of policy techniques, policy process and performativity.

**by**

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## Abstract

This research explores the contribution of policy techniques, policy process and performativity in the construction of teachers with specific learning differences (SpLDs) as subjects in the English Further Education (FE) sector. The research inquiry moves beyond subjective accounts of how teachers with SpLD navigate through the expectations of what it is to be a teaching professional, and instead appreciates how a set of circumstances created by FE sector policy reform and policy techniques, contributes to the subjectification of teachers with SpLDs. There exists a dearth of research that explores wider policy influences and policy techniques at the micro and meso levels of the FE sector. This research is situated within the interpretivist paradigm, adopting the qualitative technique of semi-structured interviews with fifteen participants from the FE sector. This research explores policy in practice and appreciates a much wider approach to policy, moving beyond just considering policy as text and encapsulating policy as discourse (Ball, 1994) within the analysis. Existing policy in practice research tends to adopt a managerial perspective in understanding the policy process. This research looks at both the micro and meso levels of the FE sector by including policy actors from a range of FE institutions, agencies, organisations and departments. In addition, the inquiry appreciates the hegemonic macro influence of performative discourse. The research concludes with three findings: 1 the *cult of the performative teacher*; 2 *post-panoptic performativity*; 3 *prove or improve techniques*. The teacher with SpLDs as a policy actor is orientated within the same policy environ as all policy actors from the FE sector. This thesis further contributes to the practice of research in terms of the process of data analysis, but also by placing the policy research within the practice of education in the FE sector.

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# Chapter 1: Introduction

## 1.1 Overview

This research explores the contribution of policy techniques, policy process and performativity in the construction of teachers with specific learning differences (SpLDs) as subjects in the English Further (FE) Education sector. The existing corpus of research on teachers with SpLDs tends to situate the affected teacher outside of the micro and meso influences of the policy process and policy techniques of performativity.

This thesis situates the teacher with SpLDs amongst their peers and colleagues by identifying them as a policy actor. There is a tendency to 'other' the teacher with SpLDs by focusing on their SpLD status and their micro experiences of how they navigate through the expectations of what it is to be a teaching professional in the English FE sector (see Riddick, 2003; Riddick & English, 2009; Macleod & Cebula, 2009). The subjective experiences of teachers with SpLDs are documented in the literature, in particular the resilience strategies they employ in their everyday teaching experience and management of their role as a teaching professional (see Burns & Bell, 2011; Burns & Bell, 2010; Burns, Poikkeus & Aro, 2013; Glazzard & Dale, 2015; Griffiths, 2012). By approaching the inquiry from the much broader status of policy actor, the site of the inquiry expands, with the potential scope to apply the findings to a much broader spectrum of the FE workforce.

This research is a piece of policy research, one that adopts Ball's (1994) 'policy as text' and 'policy as discourse' conceptualisations. Furthermore, a policy in practice approach is adopted, as a range of policy actors who work within the FE education sector are included in the research population. In the existing literature two key approaches in policy research are explored, the 'managerial/State' model of policy and the 'continuous policy cycle process' model; both of which are developed and considered in Chapter Two of this thesis (Bowe *et al.*, 1992; Braun *et al*., 2010; Dale, 1989).

This thesis adopts an approach to selecting participants influenced by the 'continuous policy cycle model', which argues that all those who work within the FE sector, including teachers, exercise levels of agency in their enactment of policy (Bowe *et al*., 1992). The extent to which agency is exercised is a matter of interest to this thesis, therefore policy actor engagement is explored at the micro, individual policy actor level, and the broader meso level within and between FE institutions, organisations, agencies and departments.

Within the exploration of the micro and meso levels of policy enactment by the policy actors, it is intended that the macro influences that govern policy process and policy techniques will be uncovered. In addition, by exploring policy in practice in a broad and holistic way in terms of the breadth of the range of policy actors - including repositioning the teacher with SpLDs as a policy actor, and in the appreciation of the micro and meso levels of policy engagement - this thesis argues that the contribution of policy process, policy techniques and performativity in the construction of teachers with SpLDs as subjects in the FE sector will be better actualised.

## 1.2 Construction of a teacher with SpLDs

The use of my biography locates me as the researcher within the research through the process of reflection and reflexivity, and draws to attention the part my biography plays in the interpretative, qualitative methodology I have adopted. By sharing my biography I seek to draw attention to the social, cultural, and structural processes and techniques that have constructed my identity as someone with SpLDs. In my formative years I was subjugated to the deficient label of a 'lazy' child; in the latter stage of my education as a trainee teacher I was further subjugated to the homogenous 'ideal' of who and what a trainee teacher should be, which is explored in this thesis. Albeit, my own personal account of resilience is of interest: the persistent subjectifying attribute appears to be the policy processes and techniques at both the micro and meso levels of engagement.

To explore this further, and to situate the key conceptualisations of the policy process, policy techniques and performativity within the site of inquiry, examples of policy are interwoven with the following personal account to illustrate the contribution the policy process plays in the construction of teachers with SpLDs as subjects in the English FE sector. Furthermore, attention is draw to examples of nomenclature associated with the neurobiological conditions of dyslexia and dyspraxia, to assist in understanding some of the macro influences which shape policy around providing an inclusive working environment for those with SpLDs.

This thesis would not be described as auto-ethnographic in the purist sense (see Ellis & Bochner, 2003:199-246). However, the methodological insights in the process of auto-ethnographic research can be used to explain how my personal biography contributed to the rationale, design, and execution of the research presented in this thesis. As stated above the purpose of this thesis is not to contribute to the corpus of research on the personal subjective experiences of individual teachers with SpLD. However, my biography depicts a relational and institutional story, affected 'by history, social structure, and culture'; an account that requires sharing if the research methodology and the purpose of the research is to be truly appreciated and understood (Ellis & Bochner, 2003: 209).

### *1.2.1 Formal education*

My journey through education began in 1979 in a Roman Catholic primary school when I was four and a half years old. I remember my formative years in education being quite a mixed experience, plagued by perplexing paradoxes. I imagine that I was considered to be an enigma by my teachers at primary school. On the one-hand I was articulate and engaging, a sponge for information, while on the other hand, a cause of frustration for my teachers who could not reconcile that behaviour with my 'forgetfulness', and inability to retain information for any period of time, exacerbated further by my illegible handwriting. How did they explain this juxtaposition – they did so by labelling me 'lazy'. I cannot recall how often that adjective was used; I can recall however how upset I was at being labelled 'lazy' when I knew I was not.

When I was eight years old I was placed in a remedial class; the school at the time did not have a special education needs (SEN) policy. Pupils were taught very basic things, such as repeating the alphabet and I recall feeling disengaged and not stimulated by education. The class teacher said to me on more than one occasion that I should not be in the class as I was very 'bright', I remember the teacher stating she would speak to someone senior and recommend that I go back to mainstream classes. Whatever they said worked and I went back to the mainstream class, where an unfortunate incident happened with a class teacher.

I was asked to recall a word as part of some form of spelling test and when I could not do so the teacher proceeded to hit me on the head with a core text book; they expected me to be able to perform like the other pupils, and when I could not they interpreted my behaviour as an act of defiance. I recall the incident as if it was yesterday; I went bright red and was stupefied by the action to the point where I could not utter another word for the rest of the class. I informed my mother of the incident and she chastised the teacher for her actions and from that moment the teacher stopped including me in similar activities, opting to avoid asking me, rather than devising a way in which I could contribute.

Throughout my formative years in education I cannot recall anyone speaking to my mother or me about the possibility that I might have a learning difference; at the time likely to be referred to as a learning disability. Moving on to secondary education (1986-1991) I continued to veer between exceptional and problematic, leaving with relatively low GCSEs. I recall feeling some excitement about starting secondary school; the first couple of years I think I enjoyed it to a certain extent, particularly history and the creative writing element of English Language. I recall being nervous in English literature classes as the teacher adopted a technique often used in classrooms, pupils would be expected to take turns in reading from the literature. The technique created a level of anxiety for me, in particular I was concerned that I would not be able to pronounce certain words. I think what made it easier is that I often enjoyed the text and so

would read a little ahead so I could practice the words – this is a technique I still use today if for any reason I have to present orally.

However, by the time I was fifteen years of age I had become disengaged with mainstream education. I talked through classes I did not understand, mainly maths because I felt lost in maths classes: the numbers would scramble and blur in my head. I did not feel like I could articulate what was actually happening to me to the teachers, so I played the clown instead. I relegated myself to only concentrate on what I was good at – or to put this another way, to do things that did not make me feel like a failure.

### *1.2.2 Post formal education*

I started a hairdressing diploma in 1991 at a FE college. There was a large amount of theory that complemented the practical side of the course. The combination of the practical and theoretical elements of the course really appealed to my inquisitive nature, the theory made sense to me in terms of how it applied to the everyday practical skills of being a hairdresser. Although I enjoyed my new career, the feeling of wanting to do more returned and I started to look through various college brochures for evening courses.

In 1998 I applied to undertake an evening HNC in Business Studies at a local FE college. I was interviewed, sat the entry tests and was informed I did not qualify for the HNC, as I had not passed the English component of the entry assessment. However, I was offered a place on a part-time BTEC course, and it was from there that everything changed. I spent my weekends and evenings working on my assignments, and really enjoyed the challenge. Due to the freedom the part-time BTEC afforded me in the planning and execution of my assignments, I was able to plan and present my work that both made sense to me, and the lecturers marking my work. It was during this time that I started to cultivate the methods I now use. Creating synthesis logs for literature, using diagrams, colours, and tables – in short, exploring techniques that enabled me to plan and execute large amounts of information into digestible chunks, which

could then be transferred into essay writing. The techniques worked and I maintained a merit/distinction profile. It was at this point that everything changed for me due to the support and diligence of the lecturers.

As before with the hairdressing course, the course lecturers on the BTEC were practitioners: they had worked in business, one of them ran their own business, and the law lecturer had previously worked in the legal sector. They ranged in age and in background. I recall speaking to the information technology lecturer who was one of the first that suggested to me I should apply for an undergraduate course. I was truly inspired by the lecturer, she had recognised my ability, and my drive to do more, and had presented me with the notion that university not only was a possibility for me, but that I was a good candidate. For the first time higher education was presented to me as an option.

The lecturers at the FE College collectively encouraged me to apply for university even though at this point I had only completed one year of the two year part-time BTEC. With their support, care, and encouragement, and based on the high grades I achieved, I applied through the UCAS scheme and was accepted at several places with an unconditional offer to read Business Studies (in the first week, I changed to a BA in Social Science), at a University in the South West of England. I felt indebted (and still do) to the FE lecturers and the FE sector for giving me the opportunity for a second chance. The experience I had in FE as a student is one of the key motivations for why later I decided to teach in the FE sector, and why I still feel so fondly towards the sector. It has been a privilege to have been both a student and a teacher in the sector, and so for me it was a natural progression that I would start my research career exploring the FE micro, meso influences present in the English FE sector.

I entered into the higher education sector as a full time, twenty five year old (I had deferred a year to go travelling before starting at university) mature student. I started a BA in Social Science and never looked back. I continued to excel in the first year of my undergraduate

course, getting 2.1s in my essays and recognition from lecturers for my carefully planned and researched seminar presentations. I responded well to the teaching methods and delivery of the lecturers, most of them had previously taught in the FE sector, and so their style of delivery was more about bringing the student with them, engaging the student through discussion, group work and other activities, rather than adopting the role of an 'expert' and talking *at* students.

During my first year, I started to think about a future in FE teaching. However, I was concerned about the vulnerable position I might find myself in if I could not recall a word, or was unable to spell something correctly. Fortuitously, one of the main lecturers, who delivered a number of the lectures and seminars, disclosed to the student body that they were dyslexic - they did so at the beginning of every lecture. They explained they did this firstly to alert the students to the fact that all of their notes were on acetates, so they would not be writing on the board, and secondly to ask if any of us noticed a spelling error, could we politely point it out and they would make a note to change it.

At the time I do not recall ever hearing about dyslexia, or the nomenclature – learning difficulties and/or learning difference before this lecturer mentioned it. As SpLDs can vary from individual to individual, the term SpLD in reference to my own experience will encompass the following three conditions: dyslexia, dyspraxia and dyscalculia (Edwards, 1994:10). There is a growing movement to redefine SpLDs under the nomenclature of neurodiversity (Singer, 1998, cited in Silberman, 2015). More will be said of this later in this sub-heading, and in Chapter 2. I decided to speak to the lecturer and explained my concern about not being able to remember how to spell, recall information – the lecturer advised me to go for an initial assessment. The initial assessment indicated I should be formally assessed and following the formal assessment I was diagnosed with a learning difficulty that was dyslexic in nature. I recall reading the diagnosis and found it strange the language 'dyslexic in nature' but I assume now that it was in part to do with my diagnosis being more nuanced – since the first diagnosis I had another one just before starting the PhD in 2014, which stated more clearly the dyslexic diagnosis, with an additional

note stating there was also evidence of dyspraxia, also known as developmental coordination disorder (DCD).

The diagnosis did not feel empowering. Instead I felt frustrated and annoyed that I had dyslexia, and that it had taken until I was nearly twenty-six years old before I was diagnosed. Following the diagnosis of dyslexia as an undergraduate I received extra time in exams, and was permitted to mark my essays with a yellow learning support sticker, which indicated to the associated lecturer they should make some considerations when marking my work – what those considerations were I do not know and I never asked, assuming I suppose that the lecturers would know what do to.

In 2003 I successfully completed my undergraduate degree and achieved a 2.1 with Hons. Following the completion of the undergraduate, I applied and was accepted on to the Post Graduate Certificate: FE (PGCE). At the time, Key stage 2 Maths and English at minimum of a grade C was not a prerequisite for entry. In a drive by the government to raise 'standards' in education, the following years PGCE: FE cohort (2004) would be required to have the requisite grades in order to start the PGCE: FE. Of note, neither of the policy documents: 'Success for All' (2002) and the FEnto 'Guidance on curriculum methodology for generic initial teacher education programmes' (FEnto, 2004) appear to consider the implications of such a policy shift. The shift in policy was significant: I was mindful of the fact that if I had applied a year later I may never have become a teacher, possibly omitting the subsequent eleven years of my teaching career.

Once I started the PGCE I inquired as to what support I might receive as a trainee teacher, I was informed there would be no support. Both I and another trainee teacher with dyslexia appealed to the academic board, via the student representative from our PGCE cohort, to request a change be made to the current policy in order to recognise the heterogeneous nature of the trainee teacher student body. However, we were informed no exceptions would be made for either the practical or written parts of the course, as it would be deemed unfair to do so. Our

peers were very supportive, and to some extent so were the course lecturers. However, it was difficult to stress the significance of the decision to our neuro-typical peers, and so both I and the other dyslexic trainee teacher with the support of the course leader, decided to deliver a session to the PGCE cohort on what it is like to be an adult with dyslexia. In particular, we shared our experiences, tools and techniques we had both adopted that aided us in the practical and written elements of our undergraduate and postgraduate education. The session appeared to be a great success; this was the moment for me when I decided I wanted to pursue research into the experience of teachers with SpLDs.

The first opportunity to do so came in the form of the final module of the PGCE: we had to write a seven thousand word research project on any matter concerning education. During my initial scoping of the current literature on teachers with SpLDs I came across Riddick's (2003) article: '*Experiences of teachers and trainee teachers who are dyslexic'*. Riddick's research at the time was one of a limited number of articles on the matter, and like the others, their research concentrated on the compulsory sector; rather than the FE sector. This knowledge, along with my experience, my peers, and the experiences of those interviewed in Riddick's research cemented my decision to explore the subject of the dyslexic teacher and the implications for teaching.

The PGCE research included interviews and observations of dyslexic and non-dyslexic teachers, with additional interviews with course leaders who would be required to action the new entry requirements. The aim of the research was to find out the experiences of dyslexic teachers and trainee teachers in the post-compulsory sector, to capture the tools and techniques they used in the preparation and delivery of their teaching. Further interviews were carried out with the PGCE: FE course conveyer and leaders to ascertain their perceptions on the implications of the new entry requirements, and to find out if any mechanisms could be put in place to address any potential marginalisation of applicants with SpLDs. The findings from the research project found the SpLD teachers to be fully committed and empathetic to their students, using techniques and tools they had developed for the benefit of their students. They

were dynamic, and forward thinking in their approach to ensure they were well prepared for every lesson. At the time it was too early to say whether the new entry requirements would exclude and/or marginalise applicants with SpLDs.

### *1.2.3 Life as a teaching professional*

After successfully completing the PGCE: FE I worked in the FE sector for eleven years as a sociology teacher, teaching the AS and A2 modules. During my time as a teacher I found my requests for adjustments were received and responded to in a haphazard and inconsistent way. Equal opportunity policy lacked maturity; college policy at the meso level did not veer beyond obligatory references to gender and ethnicity. Although there were well-versed and apparently robust processes in place for students with SpLDs, this did not translate to staff who declared their SpLD status. In fact at the application stage of my first teaching post I made a conscious decision not to disclose; this was in part to do with the 'horror' stories reported in the studies like Riddick's (2003), and my own feelings about being labelled as having a 'difference, difficulty, disability'. When I asked my then head of department if I could be timetabled in classrooms on the same floor, and preferably in rooms with technology, I was told that would not be fair to other teachers. After raising the matter with the programme manager for the department I was advised to ask individual teachers if they would swap with me; a negotiation I was not prepared to go through, as it would require me to declare to staff members on an individual basis.

On reflection, and considering my own experience of working within the FE sector, the available literature and my own research, the response from both the line and middle manager was unsurprising. How could they be expected to understand, and provide solutions when at the meso policy level, workforce diversity in the form of recognising neurodiverse staff did not exist. Line and middle managers would have had to bear the responsibility of creating solutions and adjustments on an ad-hoc basis with no meso guidance. A task burdensome in a working environment that was becoming even further immersed within performative discourse.

The performative burden on lecturers and managers appeared to increase with the introduction in 2007 by the quasi-government agency, the Institute for Learning (IfL), which stipulated lecturers in the FE sector would now have to complete thirty mandatory hours of CPD per year. In the pursuit of this additional performative target the college issued a schedule with a large number of CPD sessions. These sessions usually took place during the spring and summer term, during the time of year when lecturers wanted to take stock and reflect on their teaching and focus on adapting and creating new teaching materials. In addition, the mandatory CPD became an extra burden for me in terms of processing the information and activities, leaving me feeling overloaded and fatigue.

Throughout my teaching career from 2003 to 2014, at no point (after I had declared) did the Human Resources Department or my subject department mention the Access to Work scheme: a government initiative brought in to facilitate support for workers with a disability or health condition. I continued to adapt tools and techniques for the management and dissemination of teaching. In 2007 I started a part-time Masters in Education, while teaching full time. The MA covered matters relating to management theories, but what really piqued my interest were the sessions on policy changes within the FE sector, exploring the implications of incorporation, the 'silver book' of FE folklore – the long standing lecturers used to talk about generous conditions of the old 'silver book' contract - the small classes, with a maximum of sixteen hours teaching, compared to - at the time - twenty three hours for FTE lectures at the College.

In 2010 when I completed the final year dissertation, *How through written college policy do Senior and Middle management put into practice support for teaching staff with SpLDs?* I developed on my earlier PGCE research, although this time I concentrated on exploring how middle and senior managers supported teachers with SpLDs through the use of written meso college policy. Qualitative interviews were carried out with five participants from the same college, with representation from each layer of management: senior, middle and line management. Documentary analysis of the College's written meso policies and statements were also analysed. The findings revealed an ad-hoc approach in the support offered to

teachers with SpLD. College policies were not utilised, albeit they only explicitly referenced support for students, they were not consulted as guidance on how to support staff with SpLDs. Furthermore, government agencies such as the Institute for Learning (IfL) – which existed at the time - provide no information on how institutions might support teachers with SpLDs.

My time working and teaching in the FE sector has provided me with many opportunities and first-hand experience of navigating through the performative expectations and demands of what it is to be a teacher with a SpLD in the FE sector. I completed my masters in 2010 and contemplated for four years the decision to start a PhD. After speaking to my MA dissertation supervisor, I finally made the decision to apply to start a part-time doctorate.

There have been times throughout the past five years of the doctorate where I have felt like giving up. I have felt confined to a neuro-typical straightjacket, having to perform and present my thoughts, research and findings in a way that makes sense to the neuro-typical. Paradoxically, one of the key findings in this research is the preoccupation of 'proof' in relation to notions of quality in FE education. Interestingly, the performance of 'proof' appears to be just as prevalent in the doctoral process. I find I have to operate within the expectations of a predefined academic standard, and although I realise there has to be a standard, the risk is that neurodiverse doctoral researchers, like neurodiverse teachers, may become subjectified, or indeed remove themselves altogether if they struggle to meet the neuro-typical expectations of the doctoral research process.

Now as I reflect on my role as a teaching professional in the FE sector and my own academic journey, I can see clear parallels between those joint experiences and the ontological questions pursued in this doctoral thesis. I felt at times that I should not be a teacher because I made the odd spelling mistake, and even with practice I found it difficult to pronounce words with multiple pronouns. I aspired to the notion of the 'good' performative teacher that never made mistakes. I too wanted to be the 'same' as my neurotypical colleagues, to prove I was an 'outstanding'

teacher – and although I was critical of the accountability measures and argued their value – I succumbed to the seduction of measuring myself against other neuro-typical teachers, in turn associating any mistakes to my deficient neurodiverse mind.

During the eleven years I was teaching, accountability discourse became more pronounced: 'outputs', 'outcomes', 'value added' 'stakeholders', 'quality assurance' became a sort of mantra. Proof of teaching practice in the form of marking books, records of achievement, letters of concern, written objectives, and course booklets became normalised practice. The booklets provided me with some assurance and comfort that the students had everything they needed to know. Every day I was in by eight fifteen at the latest, and did not leave until seven thirty in the evening. In addition, I worked every weekend and dedicated large amounts of the term holidays to preparing lessons, marking etc. My experience was not unique; I was kept company by my colleagues who would also stay late each day, we were all complicit in some way to incorporating accountability discourse, as a way of defining what is meant to be a teaching professional in the twenty first century. The only difference between my colleagues and I is I felt a dual burden: first, to perform to neuro-typical standards in terms of how I perceived them and secondly to perform to the external expectations of the accountability framework that governed teaching practice. In an additional paradox, during my MA exploration I became aware of the Access to Work (AtW) scheme and my eligibility to apply for the scheme as someone who is dyslexic. However, I compartmentalised my status as a dyslexic to my role as a student, taking advantage of the disability student allowance (DSA), as was my right to do so. As a teaching professional, I forwent the statutory duty afforded me by the *Equal Opportunities Act (2010)* by choosing not to pursue the AtW scheme. The decision to not pursue the AtW scheme was partly influenced by the existing literature on the failure of the scheme (WAC, 2018), but also the fear that questions might be raised of my competency as a teaching professional – realistically what adjustments could be made in an environ where you as an individual teacher are held accountable for not only your students results, but the departments, and the results of the organisation as a whole.

In returning to the nomenclature associated with defining neurobiological difference, having been diagnosed with the SpLDs of dyslexia and dyspraxia, I considered the possibility of adopting the term of neurodiversity. Firstly, I was attracted to what appeared to be the inclusive philosophy behind the term, illustrated in this definition of neurodiversity.

> Neurodiversity: the whole of human mental or psychological neurological structures or behaviours, seen not as necessarily problematic, but as alternate, acceptable forms of human biology (Wolbring, 2007, cited in Jaarsma & Welin, 2012:23).

In particular, I welcomed the notion that dyslexia could be interpreted not as a 'difficulty', 'disability' or 'difference', but simply as 'alternate' - the neurodiverse label felt freer, without the sub-text of being somewhat 'deficient'. The use of the term neurodiversity encompassing SpLDs is relatively new in reports and literature. The AchieveAbility, Westminister (WAC) (2018) report on neurodiverse people in the workplace, and Silberman's (2015) book on Neuro-Tribes are two examples of the paradigm shift towards adopting the neurodiverse nomenclature. However, what became clear in reading the WAC Report (2018) is that although the neurodiverse term was actively used by the authors in the report to describe individuals with SpLDs, there was no evidence of a paradigm shift in the findings that would support the notion that SpLDs were considered as an 'alternate and acceptable way of human biology'. Instead, the WAC report (2018) presented evidence that argued, current work based policy at both the micro (departmental) level and meso (organisatistion/employer, government department/agency) level, often subjugated the neurodivergent employee. Citing *The Equality Act (2010)* as inadequate in its implementation, it describes reasonable adjustments as often 'poorly conceived' with the onus on the individual to 'fix' the issue, rather than recognising 'systematic barriers in the organisation itself' (WAC Report, 2018:26-30).

In addition, the existing corpus of literature on teaching professionals with SpLDs uses the nomenclature of SpLD. For the above reasons, the decision was made to continue with the catchall term of SpLD. However, some references to neurodiversity appear sporadically throughout the thesis. In particular, there tends to be a shift towards the use of the term

neurodiversity when I refer to myself; I am mindful that when I do this I am engaging in a stand against the label of SpLDs, which for me has always felt reductive and subjectivifying.

My personal account is part of the interpretive, qualitative methodology locating myself as the researcher within the research through reflection and reflexivity, by setting out the context and the policy processes in my life that have acted as a stimulant for this thesis. The Chapter will now move on to the research aim and objectives of this thesis in order to clearly define the parameters of the research inquiry.

## 1.3 Research Aim and Objectives

**Aim:** To explore the contribution of policy techniques, policy process and performativity in the construction of teachers with specific learning differences as subjects in the English Further Education sector.

**Research Objectives (RO):**

**RO1.** To analyse the benefits and purposes of policy techniques, policy process and performativity in the construction of teachers with specific learning differences as subjects, according to policy actors in the English Further Education sector.

**RO2.** To identify the policy techniques and processes in place for policy actors in the English Further Education sector to contribute to the policy consultation process, and how these contribute to the construction of teachers with specific learning differences as subjects.

In order to explore the contribution of policy techniques, policy process and performativity, first it was important to analyse according to the broad sample of policy actors from the FE sector, what they perceived to be the benefits of performative techniques, such as lesson observations, or indeed the purpose of techniques such as Value Added measures. In particular, how they

interpreted their level of agency over performative techniques. For instance could the policy actors exercise their micro agency in terms of their day to day work practices, and could they articulate why they performed tasks such as reports and progression exams? It was also valuable to capture their thoughts on the level of agency they believed they exercised in contributing to local and national policy changes and initiatives. In addition, through the identifying of benefits and purposes of performativity it may be possible to explore the dominant discourses in operation and to analyse whether other discourses exist, and how they operate within the context of the FE sector. This will enable me to conclude on whether the benefits and purposes amalgamate together to create a set of circumstances in which the process contributes to the construction of teachers with SpLDs as subjects.

In the literature on teachers with SpLD, research inquiries tend to study the affected teachers in isolation from the wider debates on performativity, teacher professionalism, and policy reform in the FE sector. In order to be able to identify how the policy techniques, and process of the policy consultation process could contribute to the construction of teachers with specific learning differences, it is necessary to understand what processes are in place for policy actors to exercise agency in the contribution to policy change (Bowe *et al*., 1992; Braun *et al*., 2010). How do they contribute to policy reform, are they part of a formal or informal process, or is the consultation process more nuanced? Are there key policy actors in policy contribution, how is the process governed, and ultimately how do policy actors contribute to the summative policy reforms? It is only once the wider policy processes and techniques are explored that an understanding can be gained on how the wider set of political circumstances contribute to the construction of teachers with SpLDs as subjects.

## 1.4 Methodology

The research methodology is situated within the interpretivist paradigm. The purposive sample population of fifteen participants is selected from the FE sector, which includes participants from two FE colleges, and other relevant agencies, organisations and departments that are part of the policy cycle process, for example, organisations responsible for lobbying government on

behalf of the FE sector, a Union and a government department. The interviewees were selected based on the understanding that policy enactment is not a privilege reserved for politicians, rather it assumes that all who are engaged in the policy cycle process from teachers to politicians are policy actors (Bowe, *et al*., 1992). In doing so, the opportunity afforded data that is deeper, richer and more interesting. In addition, the approach of considering all who work in the FE sector as policy actors -regardless of their position within their employment - broke down the hierarchy associated with the managerial/State model of understanding policy (Dale, 1989), all policy actors in this thesis were located as holding equal status.

Fifteen qualitative semi-structured interviews were conducted. The interview format enables the researcher to modify the line of enquiry as and when necessary (Robson, 2002). The use of open-ended questions provided the interviewees with the opportunity to rationalise and explain the perceived benefits and purposes of performative policy from their perspective as policy actors in the FE sector.

## 1.5 Thesis structure

The research inquiry begins with presenting the existing literature with the purpose of further developing the key concepts introduced above, and providing a context for the research. There are two literature review chapters, Chapter 2: *Theories of accountability, performativity and policy* and Chapter 3: *Further Education – Post 1992*. Drawing out the important points of the literature to this thesis, such as how the policy process, policy techniques and performativity appear to be creating a possible set of circumstances by which teachers with SpLDs could be subjugated if they did not perform to the normative expectations of panoptic-performativity (Perryman *et al*., 2018). Furthermore, the notion of post-panoptic-performativity draws attention to the possibility that the resilient strategies adopted by teachers with SpLD in the literature, are techniques of ‘stimulation’ to ensure they can perform to the ‘ideal’ of a teaching professional: an ‘ideal’ borne out of performative policy processes and techniques, rather than reality.

The use of Foucault's interpretation of the concept 'subject' is useful to illustrate how through technologies of power the 'subject' is created into a form. That form is then subject to someone else's control, either explicitly, or in application to this research implicitly, through performative regimes of truth, that render all other representations of a teaching professional subject to the performative ideal (Foucault, 1982). In Chapter 2 conceptualisations of policy and models explaining the policy process are discussed (Bowe *et al*., 1992; Braun *et al*., 2010). Performativity definitions, and how the performative process manifests in the FE sector is explored (Ball, 2003, 2013; Lyotard, 1984). Definitions of professionalism are presented, alongside discourses of teaching professionalism (Bathmaker & Avis, 2013; Holloway & Brass, 2018; Hoyle & Wallace, 2005; Shain & Gleeson, 1999). The chapter concludes by exploring definitions of learning differences, issues around disclosure, and the adoption of resilient strategies by teachers with SpLDs (Burns & Bell, 2011; Burns & Bell, 2010; Burns, Poikkeus & Aro, 2013; Glazzard & Dale, 2015; Griffiths, 2012).

Chapter 3 situates the previous chapter by documenting and exploring cultural changes, and policy reform in the FE sector, most notably from 1992 onwards. It is proposed in the literature that following the process of incorporation the FE sector shifted from socio-democratic principles to neo-liberal discourse (see Fisher, 2010; Gleeson & Shain, 1999; Lucas & Crowther, 2016; Simmons & Thompson, 2008). Attention is paid to the dominant discourses of neo-liberalism and new public management (NPM). The chapter concludes by examining the current state of the FE sector.

Following the literature review chapters, Chapter 4: *Research Methodology,* outlines the research design of this interpretivist research. Fifteen participants from the FE sector were interviewed, using a semi-structured interview technique. Arguments are presented for the adoption of a qualitative approach to data collection; the research concerns itself with the importance of adopting a reflexive stance, one that values engagement with human agency (Gademer & Fantel, 1975, cited in Baskarada & Koronios, 2018). Where the methodological approach perhaps differs to normative doctoral research, is in the situating of the research account within the biography of the researcher. As I am a neurodiverse researcher the

influence of this is most pronounced in the Chapter 4.5 *Data analysis,* in the description of the methodical process of data analysis adopted and executed. The data analysis is influenced and adopts some of the techniques of thematic analysis, however it does not undertake a purist approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Watts, 2013). In addition, the selection of participants is defined by adopting the policy actor explanation put forth by Bowe *et al*. (1992) and Braun *et al*. (2010). The chapter documents the recruitment of interviewees, the tools used to carry out the interviews, and the techniques adopted in analysing the data. The chapter concludes by presenting ethical considerations and the solutions adopted to ensure the research is ethically sound.

The three data analysis and discussion chapters are presented in Chapters 5-7. Rather than separate out the data analysis and discussion chapters, the two have been combined to provide the reader with a fully rounded experience of both the three themes as they unfold, and a first account of the findings, which will be explicitly covered in Chapter 8. The theme of agency and circumstance (Chapter 5) emerged following the exploration of participants' relationship to the micro, meso and macro environment in which they work. In order to understand each participant's perception of agency, they were asked questions about how they managed their role as a professional working in the FE sector. In discussing their experiences, a more nuanced situation of agency presented itself, which could not be fully explained by the policy process models of policy enactment put forth by Bowe *et al*. (1992) and Dale (1989). However, what became apparent is the matter of 'context', which was more complex and required analysis at micro, miso, and macro levels. The political context in terms of political ideology governing education policy was referred to by more than one participant, as was the context of the type of institution: whether a college was an inclusive or selective organisation was also commented on in terms of successfully meeting accountability measures. Theories such as post-panoptic performativity, argued by Perryman *et al*. (2018), assisted in illustrating how micro and meso agency was subjugated to the dominant accountability discourse espoused by agencies such as Ofsted.

The theme of accountability and trust (Chapter 6) emerged organically from questions regarding the benefits of performance measures. Participants shared their perceptions of the accountability framework and performance measures. The notion of 'trust' was often interwoven into responses that referenced performance measures and accountability, such responses could be likened to 'purpose' definitions of accountability by Ranson (2003:461) in particular the 'extrinsic goodness of effectiveness'. Alongside points raised regarding accountability, the matter of trust manifested in a number of responses from a range of participants. Interestingly, participants stated there existed a systemic trust issue in the FE sector, fostered by neo-liberal ideals such as New Public Management, which had influenced much of education policy reform since the 1980s (Pollitt, 1990, cited in Randle & Brady, 1997). In addition, more than one participant expressed what could be described as a tension between meeting standards in terms of the data and meeting pedagogic standards of teaching and learning. A concern emerged regarding Ofsted requirements driving behaviour, and in particular the preoccupation with obtaining and maintaining a grade 1 Outstanding classification in order to prove quality, rather than FE institutions thinking in a more 'innovative' developmental way to improve quality. There is also evidence of performative technology in the mandatory processes of lesson observations, marking/assessment policies, and continued professional development (Ball, 2012).

The theme cult of the performative teacher (Chapter 7) emerged from questions around what made an effective teacher and what is looked for in a lesson observation. Albeit, it was acknowledged by more than one participant that a formulaic approach is not expected by every teacher, there was however evidence to suggest that all teachers were expected to perform the same duties, in the same amount of time, with no exceptions, or concessions made. In addition, the teaching participants who declared they had a SpLD were equally assimilated into the ideal homogenous form of a teaching professional. In their responses, they implicitly compared themselves to their neuro-typical counterparts: one in particular declared that they should not be teaching as they could not 'hang onto the detail' – raising the question of why the 'detail' is so important. Furthermore, in order to meet the expectations of the ideal they would adopt a number of resilient strategies. The matter of reasonable adjustments was also

discussed in the interviews: participants tended not to use the legal term of 'reasonable adjustments', however they did reference language such as support, specific, adjustments, to provide examples of adapted working environments for an employee's particular need.

In addition, participants were asked questions around the policy consultation process at both micro and meso levels. Questions included who is consulted, when they are consulted, and what happens to the response. Of note was whether they are consulted as part of an official formal consultation process, or whether the consultation process is more nuanced. What started to emerge is the consultation process both formally and informally is indeed nuanced, with examples provided that did not sit neatly in a formal or informal consultation processes.

The thesis concludes in Chapter 8. A brief recap is provided for the purpose of reminding the reader of the salient points of the thesis. The chapter then moves on to explicitly state the three findings that evolved out of the three themes noted above in each of the data analysis and discussion chapters. The contribution to knowledge is drawn out of the findings and presented alongside implications for future research into teachers with SpLDs and the consultation process. The thesis concludes by providing an evaluation of the methodology. In keeping with this chapter, the concluding chapter returns to my biography in order to provide a reflexive account of the research process.

# Chapter 2: Theories of accountability, performativity and policy

## 2.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews the academic literature relevant to performative policy, policy technologies, teaching professionalism, and in particular teachers with SpLDs within the context of the FE sector. The literature was selected using the techniques of cross-referencing and snowballing. The chapter begins by discussing the conceptualisations of policy and models that explain the policy process. From there, the chapter moves into exploring the notion of performativity in terms of defining the concept of performativity, then it examines performative culture and how this manifests in the FE sector. The literature is then contextualised by exploring the FE sector; in particular, attention is paid to the history of performative education policy in the FE sector since 1944. The notion of professionalism, and in particular definitions of professionalism that are applicable to the teaching profession, are also explored. Subsequently, discourses of professionalism are compared. The literature review concludes by exploring definitions of learning differences, matters of disclosure, and the implications disclosure may have on the identity of teaching professionals with SpLDs in the FE sector. Final remarks set out the intentions of the research posited in this thesis.

## 2.2 Definitions of policy and the policy process

In order to explore the potential challenges of performative education policy for teachers with SpLDs, definitions of policy and the differing models used to explain policy process will be presented. Within sociological discourse surrounding education policy the notion of defining policy is noted as a nuanced and taxing exercise. Ball (1994) urges policy analysts from a sociological perspective to firstly consider the 'localised complexity' of policy, and to not concern themselves with looking for 'single theory explanations'. Ball went on further to alert policy researchers to the importance of beginning from a starting point of defining the term 'policy', an exercise he recognised to be difficult but necessary, as this will shape how a researcher approaches their ontological questions. In a candid response, Ball acknowledged his own

'theoretical uncertainties' in defining the meaning of policy, by deciding to 'inhabit' two conceptualisations: 'policy as text' and 'policy as discourse'. The decision to 'inhabit' both is justified in his statement 'the point is, policy is not one or the other, but both: they are implicit in each other' (Ball, 1994:15-16). In his explanation of the first conceptualisation 'policy as text', attention is drawn to the notion that policy texts are not closed, as despite policy authors making some effort to try and control the reading of a text, the readings are open to interpretation. Bowe *et al*. (1992:11) refer to the work of Ronald Barthes, and describe his conceptual work on how readers engage with literature as a helpful starting point in understanding policy text engagement. Barthes distinguishes between 'readerly' and 'writerly' readers; the former is a passive reading where the reader either accepts or rejects the text. The latter is more active, where the reader has the opportunity to contribute to the text. In developing this point, Ball states that although policies may be interpreted as 'textual interventions into practice', whereby teachers and other policy actors could interpret the policy text as 'writerly' readers, their own enactment of the text is 'not constructed in circumstances of their own making' (Ball, 1994:18). In short, policies present problems to be resolved in context; Ball argues that what cannot be predicted is how actors may react to policy, what the implications might be within a particular setting, or indeed if there is room to be proactive in the enactment of policy.

To illustrate further, Ball in reference to Riseborough's (1992) research on the response to policy by one primary head teacher, draws attention to the notion of 'secondary adjustments'. The notion refers to how teachers' engage with policy by the adoption of 'contained' strategies: 'fitting in without introducing pressure for radical change', and 'disruptive' strategies: 'attempts to radically alter the structure or leave'. (Riseborough, 1992, cited in Ball, 1994:19). It is argued that both strategies support the idea that policy authors cannot fully control the reading of a text; Riseborough states that there is a 'rich underlife to policy intention' (Riseborough, 1992, cited in Ball, 1994:19).

Before turning to the second conceptualisation of 'policy as discourse' it is worth noting the preamble by Ball:

> In ['policy as text conceptualisation'] there is plenty of social agency and social intentionality…actors are making meaning, being influential, contesting, constructing responses…attempting representations of policy…..perhaps this is caught within an ideology of agency….perhaps it concentrates too much on what those who inhabit policy think about and misses and fails to attend to what they do not think about (Ball, 1994:21).

This is a helpful way into the 'policy as discourse' approach, as it shifts the focus from the policy itself towards the discursive circumstances in which policy resides. Ball, in reference to Foucault (1977), draws attention to the way 'policy ensembles' itself and how it works alongside a 'collection of related policies' as a way of exercising power, by presenting the policy discourse as 'truth'. 'Policy as discourse' may present only certain voices as speaking the truth: 'it does not matter what some people say or think, only certain voices can be heard as meaningful or authoritative' (Ball, 1994:23). To illustrate the exercise of power in policy discourse Ball argues, in reference to Foucault, that policy constructs how we understand what positions are true by presenting them as 'regimes of truth'. In practice perhaps this may explain how performative routines, such as lesson observations, have become accepted as a 'true' measure of teacher performance, by which individual teachers 'govern themselves and others'. In returning to the notion of 'secondary adjustments' cited in the 'policy as text' approach, Ball notes caution: he argues that analysis that only focuses on 'secondary adjustments' fails to acknowledge the 'discursive limitations acting on and through those adjustments' (Ball, 1994:22-23). It is the discursive setting that may thwart or prevent meaningful interpretation and enactment of policy to take place.

In addition, Raab (1994) also explores the taxing exercise of defining policy. In reference to the work of Hogwood and Gunn (1984) he argues that there are multiple ways to define not only the term policy but also the terms policy-making and implementation – he points to the differences being determined by philosophical and theoretical political perspectives (Hogwood and Gunn, 1984, cited in Raab, 1994). A solution is offered in an attempt to circumvent the problem of defining the terms of 'policy' and 'implementation' – Raab goes as far as to call both terms

'slippery' – he suggests that the use of the term 'policy process' may raise less questions. The vexed issue of whether to approach a study of the policy process from a 'top-down' or 'bottom-up' perspective is also explored. In reference to the work of Sabatier (1986) Raab describes two perspectives: the first, top-down begins with the policy decision, such as statute or policy document, and exploring which objectives of the statute or document are realised. The second, bottom-up concerns itself with exploring actors who interact on an operational level with policy and what strategies the actors use in how they enact policy (Sabatier, 1986, cited in Raab, 1994). A consideration of both perspectives in policy analysis is recommended. From the top one can try to understand the intentions and actions of those with authority, such as policy generators. Analysis from the bottom enables a researcher to understand the policy process from other perspective(s), to consider policy networks made up of actors who function within the implementation structure.

In addition, it is argued by Lingard and Sellar (2013) in their review on Ball's prolific work of policy analysis, that Ball calls for policy researchers to broaden their site of inquiry to include the omnipresence of globalised markets in education. A brief overview of this position will be presented with the purpose of providing a holistic perspective on the policy analysis debate. However, as the research in this thesis is concerned with the English FE sector, and therefore the education policies of the nation state of England, global influences will not be considered in the data analysis and discussion Chapters 5-7.

Notwithstanding, the paper by Lingard and Sellar (2013) provides a helpful overview of the salient points raised in Ball's corpus of research on policy sociology in education. In doing so, Lingard and Sellar (2013) draw to attention Ball's call for policy analysis to 'extend its purview beyond the state and the role of multilateral agencies and NGOs to include transnational business practices' (Ball, 2012a, cited in Lingard and Sellar, 2013: 266). The evolution of Ball's work documented in a linear form by Lingard and Sellar (2013) makes it easier to contextualise, historical, cultural, and social influences in policy reform and in policy analysis spanning both the twentieth and twenty first century. In the latter work by Ball, Lingard and Sellar (2013) argue

that methodologies for 'doing policy analysis need to take account of rescaling and the involvement of international organisations such as the Organisation for Economic Cooperative Development (OECD) in the policy cycle' (Lingard and Sellar, 2013: 272). Furthermore, attention should be paid to edu-businesses and philanthropic trusts. Ball illustrates edu-business in the example of Pearson, which is described as the 'world's largest education company' – Ball refers to Pearson as a 'globalizing actor' arguing the company operates across 'pedagogy, curriculum and assessment', meaning that the global influence is projected via a range of modes (Ball, 2012a, cited in Lingard and Sellar, 2013: 272). With regard to philanthropy, Ball argues for a new form of philanthropy, one that concerns itself with 'education as big business for profit' (Lingard and Sellar, 2013: 272). Lingard and Sellar (2013) refer to Ball's description of philanthropy and how it manifests globally in the form of private companies engaging in educational sponsorship. What is more, profit is engineered in the guise of philanthropy by private sector organisations selling policy solutions and services to particular nation states (See Ball, 2012a, cited in Lingard and Sellar, 2013).

In order to illustrate the different approaches to policy research in nation state studies, the next sub-heading will explore the type of approaches adopted in the current literature. Particular interest will be paid to whether a top down or bottom up approach is taken. Furthermore, attention will be paid to how the term policy actor is defined in existing research and whether the managerial/State model (Dale, 1989) and/or the continuous policy process model (Bowe *et al*., 1992) dominant thinking regarding policy process in the FE sector.

## 2.3 Policy process models, policy actors, policy analysis research

In their research on the impact of national policy on teaching, learning and inclusion, Edward and Coffield (2007) adopted a tandem top and bottom approach to policy analysis. A clear distinction is made between those researched as part of the top approach - this group included policy-makers and officials who formed and issued policy - and those researched as part of the bottom approach - this group included those the policy was likely to impact on, such as teaching

practitioners and students. What is not clear however, is how they defined the term policy. Their interest appears to lie in the interpretation and understanding of policy from the viewpoint of two polarised groups: practitioners & learners (head teachers, teachers, tutors, students etc.) and officials and representatives of FE organisations (LSC, DfES, union organisations, awarding bodies etc.). It could be argued that further exploration using the 'policy as discourse' approach may have provided a greater insight into why, according to Edward and Coffield's findings, the second group were surprised their understanding and interpretation of policy and policy impact differed greatly to the practitioner and learner group. Perhaps, if the 'policy as discourse' approach had been explored further they may have captured the discursive circumstances in which both groups read and interpret policy.

Additional research led by Hodgson *et al*. (2008) using data from the same project, explored the implications of recent policy on the FE Sector. This time the term 'policy actor' is referenced. However, they do not explain why the particular participants named as policy actors should be identified as such.

> The term 'policy actors' is used in this paper to denote a wide range of individuals [Learning Skills Council staff] working at different levels of the LSS who are involved in policy-making and/or the implementation of policy at international, national, regional and local levels. (Hodgson *et al*., 2008:38)

Surprisingly, the sample population of 131 participants did not include any teaching staff, middle management or senior management working in FE colleges. The only reference to those working in colleges as teachers was in the discussion section of the article, where they were referred to as 'practitioners'. As a point of reflection, it could be suggested that by omitting 'practitioners' from the 'policy actor' sample population, Hodgson *et al*. (2008) may have inadvertently reinforced what Bowe *et.al*. (1992) refer to as the 'managerial perspective' of the policy process. The 'managerial perspective', also referred to as the 'State' control model, is explored and challenged by Bowe *et al*. (1992). They argue there is a common top down understanding of policy as something that is fixed, controlled and enforced by governments. Such a perspective it is argued, fails to recognise the reality of education policy as something

that is a working document and as such open to various interpretations: all who are engaged in the policy process, from teachers to politicians, are policy actors.

Of note Hodgson *et al*. (2008:23) stated that the 'policy actors' in their research expressed concern about the 'conduct of the policy process'; in particular they took exception to the application of the 'general public service reform model' to the FE sector. Further complaints were made about the speed of policy and the existence of 'policy tension' – how one strand of government policy worked against another. It could be argued that at this juncture it may have been of benefit to the inquiry if 'practitioners' were included in the 'policy actor' interviews: possible insights may have been gained into how the 'practitioners' navigated themselves through the 'policy tension' and from where they believed they were placed within the active policy process. As Bowe *et al*. (1992:22-23) argue 'practitioners do not confront policy texts as 'naïve readers' – they will select the parts they have a vested interest in. For this reason they recommend a shift away from the 'managerial perspective' and call for policy analysis to adopt a 'continuous policy cycle process' model.

The role of policy actor is considered in a more holistic way in the research carried out by Ball *et al*. (2011), in their case study of four different schools. The research builds on the work by Saunders (1987) in its appreciation of understanding how policy actors in schools are both 'receivers and agents of policy' (Saunders, 1987, cited in Ball *et al*., 2011:625). The intention is to understand how policy works, by exploring the 'different sorts of roles, actions and engagements' demonstrated in the enactment of policy. Eight different positions are identified in the role of policy actor, however only two, Narrators and Translator policy actor positions will be explained here - for more detail see, Ball *et al*. (2011: 626-635). Each position was not described as distinct, instead, it was recognised that any one individual working within a school could adopt more than one of the positions, supporting the notion that policy enactment is a fluid process and the role of policy actor is not just reserved for politicians (Bowe *et al*., 1992). The position of Narrator is usually adopted by senior leadership teams (SLT) who are tasked with explaining policy and stating which aspects will be implemented. Ball *et al*. (2011) in reference

to Boje (1991) argue that SLT's will narrate through the mode of 'storytelling' normally presented in the 'vision' of the institution for the purpose of 'knowledge management' (Boje 1991, cited in Ball *et al*., 2011:626).

The second policy actor position Translators is according to Ball *et al*. (2011) often interwoven with one of the other positions, referred to as Enthusiasts. Both positions 'speak policy to practice': they actively implement policy often through a 'collective process'. The key role of the Translator policy actor is to put policy into reality, to make it something that can be done (Ball *et al.,* 2011: 631). The merging of Enthusiasts with Translators is in the use of the Enthusiast as a 'policy model' in the form of an influencer – they are seen as an example for others as they embody policy in their practice. In the positioning of the different policy roles and positions Ball *et al*. (2011) attempts to identify how policy happens and is peopled. There is recognition that the process is iterative and subject to the values and interests of the policy actors involved. What the research seeks to do is to reinforce the argument that policy is 'not done' to teachers – instead teachers as policy actors manage and engage in the enactment of policy. However, Ball *et al*. (2011) recognises that the enactment takes place within a backdrop of competing discourses, between pedagogy and performativity. The research concludes by reminding the reader that policy in schools is often configured and re-configured, positioning the structural situation in schools as incoherent and often unstable. It urges any policy analysis to appreciate the contextual factors which shape and inform the policy actor roles, and the policy cycle process.

The intention of the 'continuous policy cycle process' model is to consider the policy re-contextualisation process that goes on in schools and colleges. The policy cycle process introduced by Bowe *et al*. (1992) argues that a 'managerial perspective' on policy enactment fails to recognise the reality of education policy as something that is a 'working document' and as such it is open to various interpretations. Therefore in adopting the 'policy cycle' method, all those that work within FE colleges and FE related agencies and institutions could be described as policy actors. Furthermore, it has been argued by Braun *et al*. (2010) that teachers and other

education workers are ‘key actors’ in the policy cycle process and should not be simply viewed as ‘subjects’.

In contrast Dale (1989), in his book on the State and education policy, argues that policy ‘gets done’ to people. In addition, he claims that policy makers continue to fail wider stakeholder groups by excluding them from the consultation process. Furthermore, policy makers tended to be ‘remote’ from the educational scene; although Dale recognised that wider stakeholder groups in the form of policy actors have the freedom to interpret policy, their interpretation is limited to the content presented at the policy implementation stage.

Unsurprisingly, Bowe *et al*. (1992:19-21) contests Dale’s ‘managerial perspective’ description, by explaining further the ‘policy cycle’ process and arguing that there are ‘three primary policy contexts’, each including some form of ‘action’. The three contexts are: the ‘context of influence, ‘context of policy text production’, and ‘context of practice’. In the latter context Ball, who co-authored the Bowe, *et al*. book, argues that policy is interpreted based on the context of any given situation; what follows is the ‘recreation’ of the policy. As a consequence of the ‘recreation’, policy generators cannot fully control the meanings of policy text; in this respect policy is fluid and not fixed. Ball goes on to argue that policies present problems which must be resolved, such policy resolutions take place within a ‘localised context’ and are likely to display ‘ad hoc-ery and messiness’. Policies rarely tell you what to do, therefore it is claimed by Ball that the reading and enactment of policy is an active process involving ‘creative social action’. However, he does acknowledge in his explanation of ‘policy as text’ the limitations of creative action in policy enactment – it supposes that individuals have the capability, understanding and resources to be able to enact policy in a contextually appropriate way. Moreover, Ball raises a more thoughtful consideration in his point about ‘intertextual compatibility’. A single policy does not operate within a vacuum, it shares the space with other policies, and the enactment of one policy may inadvertently undermine or inhibit another (Ball, 1994; Ball, 1997).

Boocock's (2014) research on the improved success rates of one Business Department at a single FE College, found evidence that supported many of Ball's points. The findings of the research revealed a shift in 'rationality' from 'accommodated rationality', where course teams within one Business Department were able to adapt policy to suit the context of the department, to 'embraced rationality', where teaching staff experienced a 'top down' approach to policy enactment, meaning that decision making became more centralised, more fixed than fluid. The findings also highlighted a contradiction between the Senior Leadership Teams (SLT: Principal, Vice Principal, Deputy Principal, Director of Quality, Director of Finance, Director of Business and Director of Supportive Education) explanation of the shift in rationality and the Business Departments lecturing staff and management (Lecturers, Course Team Leaders and Head of Sector) explanation.

Interviews with the SLT found evidence to support the 'managerial perspective' of policy enactment. According to those interviewed, 'embraced rationality', was an inevitable consequence of the 'controlling nature of a more centralised form of national policy' by the New Labour government of the time. The SLT claimed that the government 'necessitated senior managers to position the College in line with national policies' (Boocock, 2014:359). It could be argued that the position held by senior managers is one of convenience, they are complicit in the 'top down' approach by choosing not to adopt a more active approach to policy enactment. Gleeson *et al*. (2005) in their research on the notion of professionalism in the FE workplace, raise an interesting question, one that may very well explain the response of the SLT in Boocock's research. In reference to Ball (2001), Gleeson, et al. ask whether marketisation policy and practice have 'restored' professional power by 'reconstructing professionalism' through 'compliance' where rule following is the norm and 'activities are designed to meet targets with which professionals do not identify' (Ball, 2001, cited in Gleeson *et al*., 2005:456). In addition, in reference to the work of Stronach *et al*. (2003), Gleeson, *et al*. attempt to explain how FE professionals may 're-story' themselves 'in and against' performative culture: on the one hand complying to expectations, while on the other, challenging the sometimes perverse contradictions of the audit culture driven by performative discourse. This might go some way to explaining why the SLT participants in Boocock's research held their beliefs and why they 're-

storied' themselves as 'compliant'. However, Gleeson *et al*. (2005) are not comfortable with the notion that professionals 're-story themselves'; they argue that the necessary reflexivity required for a professional to consider their own actions and to change is questionable.

> It places a premium on the transformative side of identity (agency) to the exclusion of 'supply side' factors (structure)… missing in the analysis is a relational understanding of political interest and regime change that intersects professional and public issues at different levels (Gleeson *et al*., 2005:457).

Boocock's findings are in keeping with a number of articles on the FE sector that discuss post incorporation, education policy and the policy process (see Bailey & Unwin, 2014; Coffield, *et al*., 2007; Edward & Coffield, 2007; Smith & O'Leary, 2013; Smith & O'Leary, 2015; Smith, 2015). Boocock found that the shift from 'accommodated rationality' to 'embraced rationality' according to the lecturing staff and course team leaders was more to do with a change in the nature of the leadership from 'distributed leadership', involving consultation with lecturing and middle managers on college wide decisions, to what Boocock in reference to Ball (1987) describes as 'authoritarian micro-political' leadership: the dominant alliance of Directors under the Principal, and the restrictive involvement of lecturing staff (Boocock, 2014:357). It is argued that the lecturers felt the shift had led to top-down internal policy and procedure. Although no explicit reference is made to any particular conceptualisation of policy analysis, such as the 'managerial perspective', the presentation of the findings could be used to support such a conceptualisation.

However, there is one exception in Boocock's research that could be used to challenge the 'managerial perspective' status quo. Interestingly, the Head of Accounts in the Business Department chose to adopt a more accommodated rational approach by consulting the course team and enabling them to take part in decision making. This evidence could be used to support the 'policy cycle' process model of policy enactment and further supports Ball's assumptions outlined in the 'policy as text' approach.

Of interest, is the research by Perryman *et al*. (2017) which argues that policy enactment by teaching professionals is 'freer' than its' portrayal in the 'terrors of performativity' (Ball, 2003). However, teachers are still subject to policy: 'as teachers engage with policy… they are also captured by it. They change it, in some ways, and it changes them' (Perryman *et a*l., 2017: 745). In reference to the research by Ball *et al*. (2011), Perryman *et al*. (2017) argue that it is the position of policy Translators in their creation of policy and practice which leads to compliance. It is argued that Translators are active in the process of enrolling teachers as 'policy subjects' – they do so by normalising the practice of learning observations by presenting them to teachers as an opportunity to develop competences. Perryman *et al*. (2017) turn to Foucault (1979) in the use of his analogy a 'marvellous machine' to illustrate how the process leads to the creation of the 'perfect teacher' (Foucault, 1979, cited in Perryman *et al*., 2017: 747). Furthermore, Foucault's (1988) 'techniques of self' is used to illustrate how teachers not only observe policy, but through the process of self-reflection they regulate their own practice. Perryman *et al*. (2017) refer to this as the 'cult of self-reflection', which is encouraged by the Translator role through the discourse of the 'reflective practitioner'. The technique used to instil the discourse of 'reflective practitioner' according to Perryman *et al*. (2017) is through the conduit of continued professional development (CPD). The formation of CPD policy often followed another technique referred to as 'working groups'. Perryman *et al*. (2017) found that working groups covered all areas of school life, and although they were voluntary in terms of which one a member of staff could join, it was mandatory for all staff to be a member of at least one. In doing so, Perryman *et al*. (2017) argue that:

> Teachers are inculcated with a sense of ownership and become recruited to creativity. They do the work of policy by making policy work… Teachers in effect become policy, but not in the some visible brute form, rather in a process that hails them through 'interest' and 'curiosity' to improve themselves, become a better teacher, a 'good' teacher. (Perryman *et al*., 2017: 751 & 754).

Unlike Boocock's (2014) research, the approach taken in the schools cited by Perryman *et al*. (2017) appears to be a 'bottom up' initiative. The self-reflection model could be described as a more sophisticated technique, one which puts the onus on the individual teacher to 'improve'

and to self-regulate. Instead teachers are complicit in assimilating themselves into normative practice determined by what appears to be a democratic process of policy enactment, 'ruled by themselves – dominated yet free' (Perryman *et al.*, 2017: 755).

Presented so far are the definitions of policy and the approaches adopted in policy research. The next sub-heading will explore the macro discourse of performativity. Definitions of performativity will be shared and critiqued. Like definitions of policy, performativity is nuanced, however the sub-heading will conclude with providing clarity on the working definition of performativity used in this thesis.

## 2.4 Performativity: Definitions, explanations, and challenges

In much of the literature Ball and Lyotard's (1984) use of the concept performativity is often used interchangeably. However, the theoretical origins of the logic of performativity in education are cited by Ball as Lyotard's. In reference to Lyotard, Ball identifies performativity as a process in which individuals have to perform to a pre-determined regime of standards and measures (Ball, 2013). In Ball's earlier seminal work, he describes performativity as:

> Performativity is a technology, a culture and a mode of regulation that employs judgements, comparisons and displays as means of incentive, control, attrition and change – based on rewards and sanctions (both material and symbolic) (Ball, 2003:216).

Similarly, both Lyotard and Ball are concerned with the 'truth criterion' and how the technology of performativity creates a new form of "reality" and therefore a new social order, in so far as the "reality" provides the proof by which those in power legitimate their decisions.

Lyotard states:

> … the fact remains that since performativity increases the ability to produce proof, it also increases the ability to be right… since "reality" is what provides the evidence used as proof in scientific argumentation. By reinforcing

> technology, one “reinforces” reality, and one’s chances of being just and right increase accordingly. Reciprocally, technology is reinforced all the more effectively if one has access to scientific knowledge and decision-making authority. This is how legitimation by power take shape. (Lyotard, (1984:46-48).

Critically, Munday (2014) argues Ball’s definition of performativity is a narrow version of Lyotard’s explanation. He states that Ball is describing the ‘symptoms’ or ‘manifestations’ of performativity and not fully appreciating the cultural significance of the logic of performativity which has ‘taken hold of knowledge’ and replaced the ‘grand narratives of modernity’ (Munday, 2014:323). In challenge to this statement it could be argued that it is in fact Munday’s interpretation of Ball’s definition that is narrow. Admittedly, Ball does describe an essential part of performativity as a process where ‘we must make ourselves calculable rather than memorable’ (Ball, 2012:136). However, Ball presents performativity as something that does indeed permeate society, claiming that it is part of neo-liberal discourse that ‘commodifies’ professions such as teaching. Performativity, according to Ball, has created a ‘new moral system’, a new ‘truth’ where we measure our own success and the success of others by measures of commodification. He goes on further to say that the ‘technology of performance’ turns ‘us’ into ‘governable subjects’ who complicity support the discourse of performance by measuring our personal best and the personal best of others through the reductionist processes of mechanisms of measurement, standards and competition (Ball, 2013). In reference to Lyotard’s (1984) original work on performativity, it could be argued that Ball has simply contextualised the logic of performativity within a wider remit of education, extending Lyotard’s theory relating to higher education to include the compulsory and FE sectors of education; therefore this is not, as Munday claims, a different and inferior interpretation of performativity.

From here on and for the purpose of clarity, within this thesis the concept performativity will be defined using Ball’s interpretation of the concept. Ball’s interpretation is widely used in educational research, in particular, research that concerns itself with performative discourse in FE, incorporation, teaching professionalism in the FE sector and performance management

culture (see Avis, 2005; Ball, 2013; Boocock, 2014; Clarke, 2013; Grummell & Murray, 2015; Whitehead, 2005).

The next sub-heading will present literature on the macro influence of performativity on the FE sector. A somewhat historical perspective is taken in the tracing back to the era of incorporation, from 1993, during which performativity accelerated (Fisher, 2010). The literature documents how through techniques, such as lesson observations, performative discourse became embedded in the practices of the FE sector. Furthermore, the strength of accountability discourse is documented; an appreciation of how notions of professional accountability are merged with performative routines is also critiqued.

## 2.5 The culture of performativity and the FE sector

Much of the literature points to the incorporation of colleges in 1992 as a watershed moment in the history of FE – see Chapter 3. It has been argued that the incorporation process brought with it a new style of management referred to as New Public Management (NPM). NPM could be summarised as a type of management that is concerned with applying commercial market model techniques and principles to the education sector, believing them to be superior to the management styles in operation in FE pre 1993. NPM is explored further on in this chapter. As a consequence of NPM the measurement of performance, in particular quantitative indicators of performance, have become a normative practice in FE. (Lucas & Crowther, 2015; Simmons, 2008).

The concept regime of truth is presented in some of the literature as a tool to explain how performative discourse became embedded, normative, and unchallenged by the majority of managerial and teaching staff working within the FE sector. Performance management became the 'mechanism' to direct the individual practice of a college, evident Avis (2005) argues, in institutional self-assessment processes directed at the time by the regional Learning Skills

Councils (LSCs). In reference to Foucault's 'truth regime' concept, it is argued that practices such as developing targets and goals distanced managers and teachers from the 'arbitrariness of management diktat' (Avis, 2005: 211). Thus resulting in performativity becoming a 'taken for granted' regime of truth, where all alternative conceptions of good practice were not permissible.

In addition, the concept 'regimes of truth' is cited by O'Leary (2013) as one of the Foucauldian concepts that provided the theoretical background to his study exploring the observation of teaching and learning (OTL) in the FE sector. OTL has emerged, O'Leary argues, as a key performative tool in measuring the performance of teaching and learning, further embedding performativity and accountability in the teaching and learning profession. In using Foucault's reasoning that 'power and knowledge are inextricably linked', it is suggested that OTL is a key knowledge indicator, and is part of the 'apparatuses of control' (O'Leary, 2013:702). The apparatus determines the status and legitimisation of all forms of knowledge. O'Leary, in reference to Foucault, argues that agencies such as Ofsted are instrumental in supporting a regime of truth which operates to position OTL performance indicators as a 'true' measurement of quality teaching and learning. To illustrate the point further, O'Leary's study concerned itself with trying to understand how the regime of truth in the form of OTL became normalised in the ten colleges included in his sample population. The research found a uniformed response to the question regarding the main function of OTL. Participants used the language of 'quality' or 'standards', which was in accordance with what O'Leary referred to as the 'wider FE reform agenda', the primary concern of which is not to maintain standards, but to continuously improve them.

To summarise, it is claimed that agents such as Ofsted 'cast a normalising gaze' over the FE sector (O'Leary, 2013:706). Quality assurance processes which concern themselves with collecting data resulting in the categorisation of teaching professionals by Ofsted's four point scale go unchallenged, and the performative regime of truth becomes embedded within FE sector practice.

The permeation of performative discourse in the FE sector is difficult to refute; it is documented vibrantly in the corpus of literature on performativity (see Avis, 2003; Ball, 2003; Boocock, 2014; Clarke, 2013; O'Leary, 2013; Orr, 2009; Whitehead, 2005; Holloway & Brass, 2018). In addition, much of the literature depicts performativity as the antithesis to the knowledge economy. The knowledge economy is explained by Avis (2005) who argues that the knowledge economy operates within a structure that values 'high trust relations linked to the ongoing of development of human, intellectual and social capital' (Avis, 2005:212).

It is surprising then to consider the "advantages" of performativity put forth by Lyotard (1984), albeit that the "advantages" were presented from an ideological view and were not situated within any particular context or experience of performative discourse within the FE sector. Nonetheless, Lyotard states the following positive attributes of performativity:

> It cannot be denied that there is a persuasive force in the idea that context control and domination are inherently better than their absence. The performativity criterion has its "advantages"…..it requires the renunciation of fables; it demands clear minds and cold wills… it makes the "players" assume responsibility not only for the statements they propose, but also for the rules to which they submit those statements in order to render them acceptable (Lyotard, 1984:62).

Paradoxically, unlike Lyotard's position regarding the 'players' taking responsibility, if we are indeed to translate the 'players' to mean those responsible for creating performative policy, such as governments and government agencies. It is not the 'players' who are expected to assume responsibility for the success of performative policy but those who are expected to enact the policy, such as managers, teaching professionals and wider policy actors who operate within the FE sector. In a direct challenge to the political dogma espoused by successive governments and Ofsted themselves, Whitehead (2005) argued that if according to Ofsted, fifteen per cent of colleges were still 'failing', it was time for the government and Ofsted to reflect on the part they played in the supposed failure. In stressing the point further, Whitehead

declared that the perceived failure of FE was not due to a failing FE workforce, on the contrary, if the FE sector was in 'crisis' it was due to the performative culture driven by Ofsted itself. Furthermore, the notion of the 'failing' college was a misnomer, as colleges could fail for several reasons, most notably having to 'react to constantly changing education policies and contradictory government initiatives' (Whitehead, 2005:16). For a history of government policies and initiatives that have affected and are affecting the FE sector, please see Chapter 3.

Apart from Munday's (2014) article on creativity and performativity, in which he argues performativity is misrepresented, and Lyotard's theoretical exploration of the "advantages" of performativity in education, the benefits, indeed advantages, are difficult to locate in the available literature. In the National College for Teaching and Leadership research (NCTL) (2012), conducted by Christine Gilbert, on performance models in education. Recommendations for determining 'good' teaching practice appear to favour performative measures. For context, it may be of use to consider that Christine Gilbert was a former Head of Ofsted, between 2006 and 2011. The NCTL is an executive agency sponsored by the Department for Education. NCTL concerns itself with improving the academic standards of schools for ages 0-18 years. Albeit it could be argued the school environment is different to that of an FE college, there does appear to be a commonality in the strength of performative discourse governing ideals regarding what makes a 'good' teaching professional. Similar to O'Leary, Gilbert, in reference to her own research and a study carried out in 2009 by the General Teaching Council (GTC), argues that teachers see themselves as professionally accountable for their own teaching standards and those of their peers. The idea of collective accountability is pronounced by Gilbert throughout the NCTL paper:

> At its simplest, the term 'accountability' describes a relationship whereby one party – sometimes interpreted as an individual, sometimes an institution – has an obligation to account for their actions or performance to another (NCTL, 2012:8).

Gilbert qualifies this further by stating that it can be assumed that those given some responsibility for their actions or performance can be held to account. In addition, two key

approaches to accountability are presented; the first is some form of performance/productivity model which concerns itself with outputs. The second is an improvement/process model which concerns itself with reflective practice in the form of evaluation, with the aim of encouraging critical practice and debate. The former is referred to as a summative model: the key intention is to *prove* quality, the latter is categorised as formative, which is concerned with improving quality. An interesting observation to make here is the status position of each model: improving quality is subordinate to proving quality. The emphasis on proof might be an interesting research area to explore further in order to understand why so many colleges following incorporation were more concerned with proving their success, rather than investing in improving the standards of their provision - resulting in some extreme cases of malpractice (see Chapter 3 for Derby College illustration of malpractice).

Before developing the critique further, it would be useful at this juncture to consider alternative definitions of accountability. Ranson (2003), in his historical discussion regarding accountability, argues there has been a shift since the 1970s from 'professional accountability' to neo-liberal driven 'corporate accountability'. Ranson (2003) explores the relations and purpose of accountability and states the shift can be traced back to the infamous 1976 Ruskin speech by the then Labour Prime Minister Jim Callaghan, who called for greater accountability by teaching professionals to the State. The turning point Ranson (2003) argues shifted the discourse and practice of accountability from an 'instrument' to an embedded discourse, one which 'constitutes the system itself' and underpins the performative culture that education now resides within (Ranson, 2003:459). Furthermore, in reference to the work of Ball (2001a), Foucault (1991) and MacIntyre (1982, 1988), Ranson (2003) provides some explanation associated with the purpose of accountability, however it is appreciated by Ranson (2003) that the purpose of accountability is a nuanced debate; it is argued that the approach taken will depend on which of the two following modes are adopted. The first mode, 'hierarchical answerability' is illustrated by MacIntyre (1982, 1988), in the conceptualisation of 'the extrinsic goods of effectiveness' (wealth, status, power) which Ranson (2003) argues emphasises the 'holding to account' which is concerned with outputs and 'the technology of performativity' (MacIntrye, 1982, 1988, cited in Ranson, 2003: 461-462). Whereas the second mode of

‘communicative reason’, also illustrated by MacIntrye’s (1982, 1988) conceptualisations, titled ‘the internal goods of excellence’ (virtues of justice, courage and friendship) positions a form of collective accountability where human agency is instrumental in working towards achieving excellence. ‘Communities of practice’ are trusted to make judgements and evaluate performance, meaning that reductive routines become redundant (Ranson, 2003: 462). However, in reference to Foucault (1991), Ranson (2003) argues the former conceptualisation of ‘the extrinsic goods of effectiveness’ intensified, and accountability as a social practice embodied the twofold characters of ‘jurdicative’ (establishes the norms, controls and exclusions) and ‘veridicative’ (true/false discourse). Both led to a culture where ‘answerability’ superseded teaching professional ‘communicative action’ (Foucault, 1991, cited in Ranson, 2003:464).

In addition, Poulson (1999) reminds us that the term accountability is an ambiguous one in discourses about education, evident in the different interpretations noted between NCTL, (2012), O’Leary (2013) and Ranson (2003). Poulson (1999) makes reference to Raymond Williams’ (1976) concept of keywords as a way of understanding how a particular word is understood. Poulson (1998) argues that accountability has operated as a keyword in education research since the 1980s. However, Poulson distinguishes between ‘those who regarded accountability as self-regulation’ determining the professional responsibility of teachers to themselves, the professional community, and to the wider society, and those who regarded ‘accountability in education as externally imposed’ through inspection, monitoring and measurement of practice and other ‘regulatory mechanisms’ (Poulson, 1998: 421). The need to call teachers to account through the mode of ‘external scrutiny’ is what Poulson (1998) argues has led to a ‘restricted notion of accountability through control’ whereby professional dialogues are secondary to externally applied measures of ‘quality’ (Poulson, 1998: 421).

Conversely, unlike O’Leary (2014) and Poulson (1998), Gilbert in the NCTL (2012) research champions the view that teachers should be made accountable for teaching and learning standards; she describes teachers who accepted both formative and summative models of accountability as a ‘mature’ form of professionalism. Allegedly, the teachers declared that both

approaches feed into each other. The language used is of particular interest as it carries with it a persuasive tenet, one that depicts the teaching professional as a key instrument of student success. In an unsubstantiated statement, Gilbert in the NCTL research argues:

> We know that, in any system, it is the difference in teachers – most particularly the quality of *their* (author emphasis) teaching and relationships with their pupils – that makes the most difference to children's learning (NCTL, 2012:10).

A statement such as the one above could be used to illustrate and support both Avis (2005) and O'Leary's (2013) interpretation of Foucault's regime of truth. The statement is delivered by Gilbert whose past position in Ofsted will have provided her with the kudos necessary for the 'accountability' discourse to be accepted as 'true'. In Gilbert's prominent position as Head of Ofsted and in the subsequent work she has done for the NCTL, she has been part of the 'apparatuses of control' establishing performative discourse in the guise of 'accountability' as a more legitimate form of 'truth'. O'Leary argued that for Foucault, 'truth' is not to be understood as an empirical fact, but as a notion that is connected to systems of power that not only produce the notion but also sustain it. It is the system of power that 'determines the rules or the ordered procedures for the production, regulation, distribution, circulation and operation of statements' (O'Leary, 2013:702).

The system of power process may assist in explaining the general acceptance of performative discourse by those who work within the FE sector, and the way(s) it manifests itself in the wider FE context.

The implications for a teaching profession moulded within an accountability environment is demonstrated in the research by Holloway and Brass (2018). Albeit the research is situated within the United States of America (USA), there are parallels with research conducted in the United Kingdom (UK) on accountability, performativity, and teaching professional discourse, see: Avis, (2010); Bathmaker and Avis, (2013) Ball, (2013); Boocock, (2014); Clarke, (2013);

Mather and Roger, (2011); O'Leary, (2013); Orr, (2009); Ranson, (2003); Shain and Gleeson, (2009). The study was a comparative one, comparing two research projects ten years apart. The study drew on the work of Ball (2003; 2013), in particular Ball's exploration of markets, managerialism and performativity. Ball's work was used as explanatory framework for understanding the implications of neoliberal standards and accountability reforms on the 'reconstitution of the teacher-subject' (Holloway & Brass, 2018:361). The research by Holloway and Brass (2018) was concerned with examining the effect of education reforms on how teachers navigated through the accountability framework, how they governed themselves, their response to external governance, and what it all meant for them as teaching professionals. In short, Holloway and Brass (2018), considered in reference to Ball (2003):

> ... that educational policies do not simply change what educators do, it is potentially changing who they *are* [author emphasis] (Holloway & Brass, 2018:365).

In the first research study conducted between 2003-2005 following the introduction of the education reform 'No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB)'. The research participants included a sample of trainee teachers who were followed through to their first year of licensed teaching. The sample of teachers in the study were critical of the marketisation of education and teachers, taking particular exception to the drive to encourage competition amongst teaching colleagues, through the process of comparing teachers on the basis of the State Academic Achievement Test (SAAT). Participants argued such measures eroded 'collegiality among teachers' and encouraged teachers to exercise a one-upmanship attitude. This was felt by the participants to be antagonistic to their values as a teaching professional. In addition, participants felt the preoccupation with standards based managerialism, accountability, and the paper work that would ensue from such performative preoccupations had shifted attention away from 'pedagogy, learning and reflective practice' (Holloway & Brass, 2018). In reference to Sachs (2001), Holloway and Brass (2018) found that imposed standardised measures and accountability frameworks were viewed as bureaucratic by participants, and had the paradoxical effect of inhibiting teacher agency and professionalism, and prevented them from getting on with focusing on practical elements of teaching and learning. Throughout the findings a technique known as 'CYA' (cover your arse) was referred to by a number of participants, they

referred to the bureaucratic processes and paperwork as evidence of the CYA mentality. One of the participants summed up the feeling by juxtaposing the difference between their experiences on the teacher training course compared to their experience working in the USA education sector as a teacher:

> When we were [in our teaching education programme], we were about learning and processes. Now everything I hear is CYA… documentation. How did that jump from what happens in your classroom [to bureaucracy]? It's like teaching is secondary. (Holloway & Brass, 2018:367).

Of interest, although Holloway and Brass (2018) found in the first study clear frustrations with the CYA culture and the emphasis on standardised and prescriptive accountability, they did find evidence of teacher agency and attempts to follow a different discourse. Evidence was found of what Holloway and Brass (2018) described as 'progressive discourse' – teachers resisted performative discourse by asserting their agency as a teaching professional, choosing to shape their teaching practice around their own knowledge of their students. They did so by encouraging students to inquire beyond what they needed to know for the assessment of learning. Teachers created a classroom environment which encouraged 'collaborative inquiry, and learning experiences that were linked to their needs, interests and experiences' (Holloway & Brass, 2018:368). Teachers shared an awareness of how education policy and reform were changing, and what implications this may have for them as teaching professionals. In particular, they felt the policy technologies of the accountability framework had almost voided their autonomy, subject and professional knowledge and in turn had disrupted the relationship they had with their students.

Conversely, the findings in the second study conducted over the period 2013-2014 found Ball's (2003) ramifications of performative discourse and the marketisation of education documented in the article, '*The teacher's soul and the terrors of performativity*', somewhat prophetic. Like concerns raised by Lucas and Crowther (2016) on NPM and the implications of neo-liberal education policies on the teaching profession, Holloway and Brass (2018) found that teachers in the second study 'embodied a discourse that normalised accountability technologies' and

viewed them as necessary in their understanding of themselves as professional teachers (Holloway & Brass, 2018:372). Holloway and Brass (2018) found teachers understanding of performance was situated within a 'marketised discourse' where teachers applied market logics in their accounts of performance determined by external measures. One participant likened teaching to private sector notions of production by referring to performance determined by the quality of the 'product'.

> What other job are you not based on what you produce? There's no other job that you're not measured on that standard… all you have is what you produce the best product that you can, which is who can perform on a test (Holloway & Brass, 2018:274).

The juxtaposition to the first study is disconcerting, albeit not surprising if as O'Leary (2013) states, neo-liberal policy and performative discourse create a regime of truth which positions externally governed measurements as 'true' measurements of performance. Paradoxically, rather than the accountability measures being viewed by the teachers as coercive, Holloway and Brass (2018) found teachers in the sample to be critical of teachers who 'feared' being measured via lesson observations and value added comparisons, viewing the fear as some sort of admission of complacency: '… bad teachers will leave because they don't want to be evaluated, so to me it just weeds them out right off the bat…they're just sitting there not trying to improve themselves' (Holloway & Brass, 2018:375).

Moreover, teachers appeared to be unable to exercise professional agency by relying on management systems and those who governed and oversaw the accountability measures to tell them what they needed to do next. Improvement was governed by external determinates, and often teachers would question themselves, instead of critiquing or questioning the measurement. Instead of feeling undermined the teachers appeared to embrace what they perceived to be objective measures of their performance, so rather than being 'terrorised' by the accountability measures, teachers experienced 'pleasure' from the assurances they received from the testable measures of the accountability regime (Holloway & Brass, 2018:378).

The ‘marketised discourse’ identified by Holloway and Brass (2018) could be explained as a by-product of what Perryman *et al*. (2018) refer to as ‘post-panoptic performativity’. It is argued in the research by Perryman *et al*. (2018) that the goal posts in teaching are constantly shifting, leading to what they describe as ‘fuzzy norms’. In order to manage the unstable environment in which education operates, the default position in schools and colleges has become one of self-surveillance. Schools and colleges are in a constant state of Ofsted readiness, so much so that they engage in what Perryman *et al*. (2018) refer to as acts of ‘stimulation’. In reference to Bogard (1996), Perryman *et al*. (2018) explain how the threat of surveillance can lead to teachers exercising agency in preparing their practice to ensure they are pre-prepared for events - the ‘gaze’ of inspection stimulates a response (Bogard, 1996, cited in Perryman *et al*., 2018:150). It could be argued in considering the act of stimulation that the teacher acts as a technique of post-panoptic performativity and is instrumental in further embedding performative discourse and practice in education. Albeit, teachers may not perceive themselves as being complicit, instead as Perryman *et al*. (2018) in reference to Foucault (1988) argue, teachers have been made ‘subjects to codes of ethics and behaviour’. This subjectification leads to ‘techniques of the self’ which create the illusion that the teacher is exercising agency, rather than being subject to external controls (Foucault, 1988, cited in Perryman *et al*., 2018:148). Furthermore, it is positioned that teachers learn to ‘police themselves’ as a symptom of the hegemonic influence of accountability and performative discourse embedded in the regimes, policies and practice of education institutions (Perryman *et al*., 2018:148).

The discourses of performativity and accountability not only changed the context in which teaching professionals operated, but also the techniques of the discourses changed the teaching professional landscape. What it meant to be a teaching professional in the twentieth century, and what it means to be one in the 21st century will be explored in the next sub-heading. Definitions of what it is to be a professional are explored, and illustrated in the literature concerned with critiquing State intervention in the shaping of professional discourse.

## 2.6 Teacher professionalism: Definitions, discourse(s) of professionalism and government intervention

Of note, much of the literature exploring the nuanced debate on FE teaching professionals, tends to focus on teachers who have entered the FE sector as skilled vocational practitioners, (see Bathmaker & Avis, 2013; Englund & Gerdin, 2019; Holloway & Brass, 2018; Robson *et al*., 2004; Simmons & Thompson, 2007; Shain & Gleeson, 1999; Spenceley, 2006). The vocational practitioner variable adds another layer of complexity to the task of defining and supporting the notion of an FE teaching professional. Albeit, not all of the literature on the subject of teacher professionalism in the FE sector attempts to define it, where it is defined there is a tendency to borrow from traditional notions of professionalism usually associated with the medical and legal professions (Hoyle & Wallace, 2005).

The traditional understanding of the concept of professionalism is explored by Hoyle and Wallace (2005) state that it is determined by two interconnecting components. The first component concerns itself with how certain occupations are determined as professions by the acquisition of unique characteristics. The second component is the process of *professionalization* – this is the process where the first component of professionalism reaches maturity and becomes accepted as a profession. Hoyle and Wallace state that there are seven characteristics associated with the first component. However, of the seven listed, only three will be explored, as much of the literature on teacher professionalism in the FE sector centres on the following three characteristics: a specialised knowledge base; high degree of practitioner autonomy - though limited in some measure by legal and political control; and a commitment to client-interest values expressed in a code of ethics. In addition, Hoyle and Wallace segment the term *professionalization* further by splitting it in two, the first he refers to as the *institutional* segment, stating that: ‘The process by which an occupation increasingly meets such criteria as a strong boundary, self-regulation and accredited practitioners’ (Hoyle & Wallace, 2005:100).

Hoyle and Wallace describe the second segment as a *service* segment and refers to the process by which ‘Members of the occupation improve their core skills, give priority to the needs

of clients, are unstinting of time and generally enhance the quality of provision' (Hoyle & Wallace, 2005:100).

This distinction is of particular interest, as it provides an entry point into one of the more critical stances about the perceived privileged status of professionals. In reference to Perkin's (1989), Hoyle and Wallace claim that by the middle of the 1970s a notable dominance of an 'institutional' professional society had emerged, whereby the status interests of professionals took precedence over the 'service' interests. Hoyle and Wallace conclude their point by arguing that education, alongside other public services, had lost favour with politicians and the general public. Education professionals were perceived as self-serving, with 'providerism having prevailed over consumer interests' (Hoyle & Wallace, 2005:100). The portrayal of teaching professionals as self-serving is referenced several times in the literature, with one speech cited as being of particular significance in the shift towards making teachers more accountable, and the State more instrumental in governing education.

The Ruskin College speech of 1976, by the then Labour Prime Minister Jim Callaghan, is argued by Spenceley (2006) as the inception point from which the notions of 'traditional' professionalism were called into question. Callaghan, according to Spenceley, raised concerns about the autonomy of teachers and their lack of accountability to the State. In addition, Stoten (2013) draws attention to the 'economic benefits of education policy' challenge presented in the speech by Callaghan. It is argued by the above, as well as Shain and Gleeson (1999) that the Callaghan speech paved the way for the 1979 new right government under the leadership of Margaret Thatcher. The Thatcher government introduced greater State control over education, advocating tighter regulation and accountability of teachers to the State. State control manifested itself, Shain and Gleeson (1999) argue, in the form of education policy, in particular in two key pieces of legislation: the 1988 *Education Reform Act (ERA)* and the 1992 *Further and Higher Education Act* (see Shain & Gleeson, 1999; and Chapter 3, for more detail on State intervention). The government onslaught targeted in particular the traditional professional characteristic of autonomy.

The autonomy of teaching professionals was curtailed most notably in the ERA (1988), by the introduction of a National Curriculum; Dale (1989) claims that this marked the end of teachers' curricular autonomy. In addition, the F&H Act (1992) brought with it greater surveillance and regulation over FE teaching professionals. Furthermore, following incorporation in 1993, NPM became the dominant form of management discourse, concerning itself with matters of efficiency, economy and effectiveness. The decline of industrial relations in the FE sector increased under NPM, as the professional status of teachers was eroded through a series of attacks on their working conditions, pay and in some instances in the replacement of teaching staff with 'learning support workers' (Lucas & Crowther, 2015; Shain & Gleeson, 1999). The dismantling of some of the core principles of traditional professionalism, led to what Hoyle and Wallace (2005) explain as two views. The first argues that the FE professional has become 'de-professionalised'; the second states that a 'new professionalism' has emerged, one which concerns itself with bureaucratic and market models, and is managed and led by government intervention. Both views will be explored and situated within the current literature on FE teaching professionals.

Government intervention in the form of redefining the notion of teacher professionalism is a recurring theme in the literature. Some, including Hoyle and Wallace (2005) refer to this new form of professionalism in the FE sector, as 'new professionalism' whereas others, such as Stoten (2013) refer to a process known as 'professionality'. It is worth noting here that many of the characteristics associated with either form are similar, if not the same; it is likely that both terms are used interchangeably in the literature. Such an assumption is supported by Hoyle and Wallace's own admission in their use of the term 'new professionalism':

> This term has no single connotation and there is far from unanimity about the nature of the phenomenon (Hoyle & Wallace, 2005:169).

Both 'professionality' and 'new professionalism' depict a form of professionalism that has lost a key attribute of traditional professionalism, that of autonomy. Teachers are now expected to conform to the demands of the institution and the managers they work for. Compliance and

subordination are expected. In reference to Ball (2003), Stoten (2013) connects performativity discourse and the struggle of teachers to 'self-identify' as professionals. The struggle, Stoten claims, manifests in the form of teachers experiencing 'values schizophrenia' as they try 'to reconcile their own very personal view of professionalism with the need to conform to the prevailing organisational culture' (Stoten, 2013: 367-368).

The mounting and continued influence of the State on the shaping of professional discourse is explored in the next sub-heading. There is a persuasive tenet in the literature which argues that performative discourse is concerned with shaping teaching professionals into a compliant and homogenous whole (Ball, 2003; Holloway & Brass, 2018; O'Leary, 2013). However, the literature presented below depicts a more heterogeneous reading of teaching professionalism, evident in the professional discourses outlined by Shain and Gleeson (1999) and Bathmaker and Avis (2013). In addition, as referred to earlier, Holloway and Brass (2018) documented changes in professional discourse.

## 2.7 Heterogeneity of the FE sector and the 'shifting' discourses of teacher professionalism

Within the literature there are two pieces of research in particular that present an account of the competing discourses on the notion of teaching professionalism in the FE sector. The first is a historical perspective by Shain and Gleeson (1999). The second presented by Bathmaker and Avis (2013) is more recent. Both articles tend to focus on the vocational educator, nonetheless, the points made regarding the diversity of the sector and how teachers in FE construct their professional identity are of value to this thesis. What is of particular relevance to this research are the dominant types of professional discourse evident in the findings, as well as the appreciation given by both papers to the complexity of trying to apply a 'one size fits all' definition of professionalism to the FE sector. Shain and Gleeson (1999) begin with a word of caution over the assumption that FE educators have a shared set of values informed by a discourse of public sector professionalism. They stress that FE educators have 'historically been internally stratified according to divisions of skill, age, gender, ethnicity, expertise and class'

(Shain & Gleeson, 1999:453). Of note, is their nod to the 'continuous policy cycle process' model put forth by Bowe, *et al*. (1992). The model is mentioned almost as a foreword before they begin their exploration into the discourses of professional identity. For clarity, the policy cycle process model argues that all those who come into contact with policy, in this instance education policy, are policy actors. Teachers, as Ball (1994) argues, do not receive policy as empty vessels, they will, according to Shain and Gleeson:

> Filter policies of reform and change through their existing professional ideologies and perspectives. This produces different strategies or adaptations in the teacher workforce that range from willing compliance with new policy to resistance and rejection (Shain & Gleeson 1999:453).

Although they found evidence of professional discourses relating to rejection, resistance and compliance in their study of five FE colleges, the dominant discourse noted was *strategic compliance*. Strategic compliers are described as those who were critical of some areas of educational reform, but accepting of others. They managed to maintain elements of public sector professionalism 'reworked in the current context':

> There do appear to be core values that guide, in different ways, the routine practices of the majority of lecturers in our study. [Including a] commitment to student learning [with an emphasis on] particular model of quality that is defined through process rather than outcome, [and the need for] collaborative modes of work [between lecturers]. (Shain & Gleeson, 1999:460).

Although Shain and Gleeson (1999) acknowledge the reports of de-professionalisation, and what could be described as 'new professionalism' in the form of government directed forms of professionalism, their evidence points to an even more nuanced account of teacher professionalism. Ultimately, the take away point is that FE teachers are *active* in the shaping of professional discourse(s); they are 'redefining professionalism *in spite of rather than because of* [author's emphasis] official policy agendas' (Shain & Gleeson, 1999:459). This explanation is in accordance with much of the literature, including that of Bathmaker and Avis (2013) which we now turn to.

Four discourses of teacher professionalism are identified by Bathmaker and Avis: Organisational professionalism, Occupational professionalism, Critical professionalism and Personal professionalism. In summary, the authors argue that there exists a tension between the discourses of personal professionalism and organisational professionalism. To clarify, they argue that organisational professionalism, in reference to Evetts (2009), is professionalism managed from above by governments and government agencies such as Ofsted. This description is in keeping with the form of professionalism referred to by Hoyle and Wallace (2005) as, 'new professionalism'. The use of different terminology to describe the same or a similar form of professionalism complicates the debate further; not only are the definitions and discourse of professionalism nuanced, but so is the nomenclature applied to a form of professionalism. Personal professionalism is a form of professionalism that was identified in an early piece of research by Bathmaker in (2006) in which this type of professionalism included the following attributes: a commitment to students and a commitment to subject or occupational specialisms of the FE teacher, with some influence from the teachers own personal experience of education. There is a commonality in the description of the personal professional and that of the professional discourse of *strategic compliance* found in the research by Shain and Gleeson (1999). Both have a 'strong service ethic' but also a willingness to retain professional identity through exerting themselves as educators of specialist knowledge, which is in keeping with the 'specialist knowledge base' of the 'traditional professional' referred to by Hoyle, (2005).

In addition, Bathmaker and Avis (2013) found in their longitudinal study spanning a period of eight years from 2002-2010 evidence to support the discourse of personal professionalism. However, they raise a word of caution over the pressures of organisational professionalism: if the pressure is too great and individual teachers cannot or will not conform, then they may exit the teaching profession.

To add to the taxing debate on discourses of teacher professionalism, Spenceley (2006) presents a further challenge - the difficulty, she argues when defining professionalism, is that

expertise as a teacher comes not from 'recognised, pedagogically based qualifications' but from knowledge and skills gained from a previous occupation. In addition, Spenceley makes an interesting connection to Bourdieu's (1988) notion of 'cultural capital', albeit it should be noted that mandatory FE teaching qualifications for those in-service and those wishing to enter the FE sector were introduced a year after the article was published. It is of interest to note however, that in 2013 mandatory qualifications to teach in the FE sector were revoked in the *Further Education Teachers' Qualifications (England) (Revocation) Regulations, 2013*, an amendment to *The Education Act 2002,* this circular action places Spenceley's connection into a contemporary context. In reference to 'cultural capital', Spenceley argues that professional status in teaching is usually acquired through 'specific, socially and economically recognised, pedagogically based qualifications' (Spenceley, 2006:209). Without this, the title of professional could be called into question. To add a further dimension, it is acknowledged that for many who enter into FE as vocational teachers, education is a second career, one in which they see themselves as 'subject professionals' (Spenceley, 2006). There is evidence to support Spenceley's assumption: the Fullick's report in 2007 produced on behalf of the *Commission for Disabled Staff in Lifelong Learning*, found that the FE sector provided a 'second career' opportunity for many who had worked in other areas of the service sector.

The concern of a 'subject professional' is to equip students with specific knowledge and skills associated with a vocational occupation. Therefore they chose to value 'specialist knowledge of subject or trade above pedagogy', thus reinforcing their professional status in terms of their vocational career over their career as educators or teachers (Spenceley, 2006:292).

In adding another dimension to the debate, Englund and Gerdin (2019) explore the psychological mechanisms that performative technologies appeal to; they do so by situating the current critical educational literature within a framework referred to as CMIS - compliance, mirroring, identification and self-realisation. Englund and Gerdin (2019) urge for more attention be paid to the 'inner mentalities of teachers' as they argue in reference to Foucault (1993), such a consideration could assist in explaining how performative technologies shift from simply being

'technologies of domination' to 'technologies of the self' (Englund & Gerdin, 2019:503) – as illustrated above in the comparative study of Holloway and Brass (2018). In consideration of compliance, England and Gerdin (2019) argue that teachers are subjectivised by compliance in as much as they will permit themselves to be guided by externally set accountability measures, and will comply with them. The psychological mechanism at play is one of 'dependence' - as O'Leary's (2013) and Holloway and Brass (2018) found that teachers can 'depend' on the performance measure awarded them on completion of a lesson observation, or on a comparison of their value added to their colleagues or peers. Their behaviour, Englund and Gerdin (2019) argue, is then rewarded and/or punished through techniques such as performance related pay, or through promotion – with punishment resulting in performance management and possible dismissal. Englund and Gerdin (2019:505) further identify a 'mirroring process', which involves normalising and internalising performative techniques; this not only has an effect on the individual in terms of how they 'identify' as a teaching professional, but on those around them, as teaching peers and colleagues will 'ape' the normative processes and techniques of performative discourse, with the intent of being viewed by said peers, colleagues and managers as compliant. Englund and Gerdin (2019) in this instance argue the psychological mechanism at play is an individual's 'need for positive self-esteem', which is derived from how they are perceived by others.

Furthermore, the notion of identification is explained by Englund and Gerdin (2019) as something that is distinct from the notions of dependence and mirroring, which they claim are related to more forceful means due to the coercive use of rewards/punishments through incentives, and the encouragement to be something they were not. The purpose of 'value identification' is to present the values of performative discourse as being one and the same as their own values, and ideas of what it is to be a 'good' teaching professional. The psychological mechanism at play, Englund and Gerdin (2019) argue, relates to 'personal significance and relevance' which is not borne out of incentives or positive self-esteem. Forced governance is no longer necessary, as performative technologies come to be 'naturalised': teachers view performative technologies as not only the means to measure performance - student grades, value added comparisons - but they also view the techniques as instrumental in improving

outcomes (Englund & Gerdin, 2019:508). Boocock, (2014) found evidence of this in the 'embraced rationality' of the teachers documented in Boocock's research – the teachers adopted a 'top down' passive response to enacting performative techniques. However, it could be argued that the teachers and middle managers in Boocock's (2014) study did this as a result of forced compliance, rather than embracing the techniques as valuable.

The final notion identified by Englund and Gerdin (2019) is referred to as 'self-realisation' and relates to 'value identification' – both 'stress how performative technologies are pivotal in constructing a subject'. However, 'self realisation' is more manipulative in its presentation: it presents performative technologies as tools which support and encourage teaching professionals to be 'autonomous' and 'free' subjects (Englund & Gerdin, 2019: 510). The psychological mechanism at work is the notion that 'teachers' have a presumed need to realise their personal aspirations and ambitions' – such ambitions can be played out within a performative environ as teachers compete for rewards; the education market gives them the agency to choose to compete. Paradoxically, although their 'freedom' is regulated, performative technology provides the tools for them to 'diagnose and assess themselves' so they can 'improve' and feel satisfied (Englund & Gerdin, 2019:510). Englund and Gerdin's (2019) analysis moves away from one dimensional explanations of the effects of performative technologies on teaching professionals, and instead illuminates the many roles that the technologies play in reproducing performative and accountability discourse. In terms of appreciating the psychological element at play, Englund and Gerdin (2019) present the teacher as exercising greater agency, albeit that the available discourse in which a teacher operates is not necessarily of their choosing.

Research on teachers with SpLDs tends to be situated outside of debates on discourses regarding teaching professionalism. Instead, the growing corpus of research tends to focus on the SpLD status of the individual teacher, and attention is drawn to debates and discussions around the decision to declare and the resilient strategies adopted by teachers with SpLDs. The next sub-heading will explore the identity of teachers with SpLDs by considering first how

the nomenclature of SpLD is defined; then it will move on to consider the models of disability that influence and shape the definitions associated with SpLDs.

## 2.8 The identity of teachers with Specific Learning Difficulties (SpLDs): definitions and models of disability

Much of the existing research on teachers with SpLDs tends to confine itself to the reporting of the subjective experiences of individual teachers with SpLDs; in particular, the experience of trainee teachers in the compulsory and the further education sectors (Riddick, 2003). It is of interest to note however, the steady albeit a modest increase in research exploring areas such as, how teachers with SpLDs negotiate their professional identity and the resilience strategies adopted by trainee and in-service teachers with SpLDs. More recently, there has been an attempt to step outside the convention of focusing on the 'affected' neuro-diverse individual by briefly considering the external influences of performativity discourse (Glazzard & Dale, 2015), and the influence of 'organisational routines' both ostensive – 'teacher workforce policy development', and performative – 'ambiguities of enactment', on teachers with SpLDs (Thorpe & Burns, 2016:210). However, it is important to note that the substantive part of both the articles mentioned still focuses mainly on the personal perspectives of in-service teachers with SpLDs.

Griffiths (2012) argues, in her comparative research on nursing and teaching professionals with dyslexia and the challenges they face in the workplace, that debates tend to neglect those with neuro-diverse conditions such as dyslexia, or dyspraxia. Instead, research tends to focus on the social barriers created by the 'non-disabled majority towards those with physical impairments' (Griffiths, 2012:60). This is an important observation and one worth bearing in mind when considering existing research on teachers with SpLDs, as it aids in understanding the context in which the current dearth of research occurs.

There are two reoccurring themes in the literature, the first centres around the nuances of defining what a specific learning difficulty is, and the second concerns itself with the personal decision of the 'affected' teacher to disclose to their employer, manager, students and

colleagues their disability status. In addition, in some of the literature, disclosure is intertwined with the teacher's own sense of professional identity.

The task of defining SpLDs is noted in much of the literature as a difficult and perplexing task. O'Dwyer and Thorpe (2013) begin with a formal definition of disability by the Equality & Human Rights Commission:

> A person has a disability if he or she has a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long term adverse effect on that person's ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities'. (2010b, p. 72, cited in O'Dwyer & Thorpe, 2013:2).

What is of interest here is the trend in the literature to adopt a more formal definition of disability, such as the one above, (see Burns & Bell, 2011; Glazzard & Dale, 2015). On the occasion where a definition is not made explicit in the literature, a reference will be made to the *Disability Discrimination Act 2005*, the *Equality Act 2010* and other equality legislation. It could be argued that in the absence of an objective, fully accepted academic definition of SpLDs, adopting a formal definition is helpful. Paradoxically the formal definitions are underpinned by the bio-medical model of disability, with a central nub of the definition pointing to a neurobiological condition; the concern is that the current literature does little to challenge the prevailing biomedical discourse of defining disability.

In an attempt to move away from bio-medical definitions of disability, O'Dwyer and Thorpe (2013) considered a more nuanced definition used by Bradley, Danielson, and Hallahan, in their research on exploring the sociocultural context of language based learning difficulties:

> The central concept of SLD [specific learning difficulties] involves disorders of learning and cognition that are intrinsic to the individual. SLD are specific in the sense that these disorders each significantly affect a relatively narrow range of academic and performance outcomes. SLD may occur in

> combination with other disabling conditions, but they are not due primarily to other conditions. (Bradley, Danielson, & Hallahan, 2002:792)

From here on and for the purpose of clarity, within this thesis the concept SpLD will be considered in line with the above definition, albeit with the caveat raised by Edwards (1994) in her account of the painful and emotional experiences of late adolescents with dyslexia. Edwards argued that the use of the word 'specific' was a misnomer and unhelpful, as conditions such as dyslexia are 'wide ranging and erratic manifestations' (Edwards, 1994:10).

The bio-medical model presents the cognitive disability/difference as an individual matter, one in which society has no bearing. The responsibility of addressing the disability lies with the affected individual: they must learn to, according to Fitzgibbon and O'Connor (2002) in their work on adults with dyslexia in the workplace, 'accommodate the demands of the social and physical environment that surrounds them' (Fitzgibbon & O'Connor, 2002:26).

Conversely, the social-model of disability is one of inclusion; it argues that disability is 'the product of environmental and social structures that exclude those with physical, intellectual or cognitive impairments' (Fitzgibbon & O'Connor, 2002:27). Thus, the social-model promotes the accommodation of the disabled person by society. Interestingly, in the literature there exists a discord on the matter of which model underpins the Equalities Act (EA) 2010. O'Dwyer and Thorpe (2013) argue that although the advice and guidance supporting the EA 'hints' at a social-model influence, the EA itself defines disability using bio-medical model terminology. In addition, they point to the Access to Work scheme, a government intervention, which places the onus on the disabled worker to seek support from their employer, as an example of bio-medical discourse in action (DoW&P, 2019). In contrast, Glazzard and Dale (2015) claim that the EA is a positive development as it is 'influenced by the social model of disability that positions disability as a socially constructed phenomenon and usefully differentiates between disability and impairment' (Glazzard & Dale, 2015:178). In support of their claim, they go on to recount the investment by the Labour government (1997-2010) in initial teacher training in special educational needs and disability, as evidence of a commitment to inclusion and the social-

model perspective. The discord between the two articles raises an interesting, albeit perplexing juxtaposition, as it illustrates the disconnection between government policies and matters of inclusion when it comes to adults, and in the context of this thesis, how such a tension could subjectify teachers with SpLDs.

The next sub-heading explores one of the key points of the literature, disclosure, which is presented as a complex and difficult decision, entangled in perceptions of what it is to be seen as neuro-typical and competent. There are some disconcerting statistics and research which present the choice to disclose as something that is not done in insolation; affected individuals consider the wider culture and perceptions in their decision to identify as having an SpLD (See: Macleod & Cebula, 2009; Thorpe & Burns, 2016; WAC Report, 2018).

## 2.9 Disclosure, and the professional identity of teachers with SpLDs

In the early research accounts of trainee and in-service teachers the reluctance and fear of disclosing their disability status to employers, colleagues and students, is a prevailing theme, (see Riddick, 2003; Riddick & English, 2006). An interesting and telling theme emerged, according to Macleod and Cebula, in their research on disabled trainee teachers in one University based in Scotland. Of the seven hundred and twenty one participants who completed the survey, thirty six provided additional information on their reasons for, or against, disclosing their disability status. Macleod and Cebula used the following quote to summarise the common response from those with SpLDs:

> Concern about reaction/response (six): 'I didn't think it would affect my placement and I didn't want the school to think I was an inadequate teacher' [B.Ed. primary student with SpLD] (Response extract from Macleod & Cebula, 2009:464).

In addition, an interesting point was raised regarding the lower than expected response rate of those with SpLDs in their research. Only 23.5% reported having a SpLD; this compared to the

University sample frame figure of 50.3% and the national figures, taken from the Higher Education Statistics Agency (2008). Speculative explanations are presented, one of which is of particular interest to this thesis:

> … it is possible that students with SpLD are more reluctant to take ITE [Initial Teacher Education] courses than students with other types of impairment… the proportion of students with SpLD applying and being accepted onto ITE programmes may relate to a variety of factors, including recruitment and selection procedures, and the format and accessibility of the programme (Riddick & English, 2006, cited in Macleod & Cebula, 2009:462).

In more recent research, the low percentage of disclosure is still pronounced. In Burns, Poikkeus and Aro (2013) they refer to a workplace study by Gerber and Price (2008) who claim that 85% of adults chose not to disclose their SpLD to their employer. Burns and Thorpe (2016) refer to statistics by both the Education & Training Foundation (ETF) 2015, and the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) 2015. The former, using data from the FE workforce collected in 2012-13, found that 4.4% of staff disclosed some form of disability, while the latter gathered data from employees in UK higher education institutions. They found that 3.8% stated they had a disability, of that figure 18.2% disclosed a SpLD (Thorpe & Burns, 2016:201).

Furthermore, investigated barriers to employment for neurodiverse people, including those with SpLDs, found seven key findings (WAC, 2018). Of these, disclosure was identified as leading to discrimination: 75% of those surveyed stated they did not disclosure their neurodiverse status for fear of being discriminated against. In addition, of those that did disclose 20% regretted disclosure, citing the stress of disclosure as one of the main reasons for their regret, as they felt they had to 'constantly justify their ability to achieve tasks associated with their post' (WAC, 2018:18).

The statistics reported in the literature make for a disconcerting read, compounded further by the speculative claims made by researchers Macleod and Cebula (2009) and Riddick and

English (2006), that trainee and in-service teachers may choose not to disclose due to possible reprisals, or that questions of competency might arise, tarnishing the professional teacher status of those with SpLDs. In addition, Thorpe and Burns (2016) raise the concern that the statistics are likely to be under representing the number of employees with a disability in the FE and HE sectors. They state that both the ETF and the HESA acknowledge that a large number of respondents did not complete the disability declaration section. In consideration of the available literature, such an acknowledgment implies that little has changed over the past fifteen years with regard to the number of employees declaring their disability status. It would not be helpful here to speculate further as to why the situation has not improved, however the literature provides some useful insights into why disclosure is such a tentative and in some cases a painful decision, (see Glazzard & Dale, 2015; Griffiths, 2012; Riddick, 2003; Riddick & English, 2006).

Another interesting theme in the research on teachers with SpLDs is the subjective accounts of resilient strategies adopted. Burns and Bell (2011) approached teachers with SpLDs from a social constructionist viewpoint, concerned with the social influences that may shape the identity of teachers with SpLDs. In their findings Burns and Bell (2011) found 'a wide variety of subject positions' in the way the affected teachers described their understanding of themselves and how they managed the role of a teaching professional (Burns & Bell, 2011:955). One of the constructions of identity referred to as 'the teacher capitalising on personal strengths' illustrated best how the teacher with SpLDs adopts strategies based on what they perceive to be their strengths regarding how they navigate through the expectations of the workplace. Burns and Bell (2011) stated that 'the interviewees relied heavily on recognising and mastering their strengths when working as a teacher' (Burns & Bell, 2011:957). In later research, Burns, Poikkeus, and Aro (2013) specifically explored the resilience strategies adopted by teachers with SpLDs, with the purpose of contributing to the growing corpus of research on perspectives of teacher resilience (See Burns, Poikkeus and Aro, 2013:79). The study found a plethora of challenges, with resilience strategies devised to cope and manage each challenge. Many of the strategies developed were unique to the individual and the context in which they worked.

However, dedicated time and resources had to be carved out of the individual's professional working life to ensure they could successfully plan and execute the strategies. Interestingly, there was an element of commonality in the 'information management and processing', although it was acknowledged that the success of any resilient strategy would depend on the affected individual's ability to sustain, reinforce, and if necessary evolve the strategy, should working conditions change (Burns, Poikkeus and Aro, 2013:83).

In light of the existing literature there appears to be a current vacuity in the research on teachers with SpLDs, in particular there is an absence of any considered exploration into education policy, policy technologies and how these may contribute to the construction of teachers with SpLDs as subjects. The research presented in this thesis will address the vacuity by shifting the focus from the 'affected' individual to an exploration of the micro and meso influences of policy, policy technologies and policy actors on the construction of teachers with SpLDs as subjects.

## 2.10 Summary

This chapter opened with defining policy and the policy process, with some thoughts put forth by Ball (1994) and Lingard and Sellar (2013) on the approach future research into policy in education should take. Subsequently existing policy analysis in education was presented, and the policy process models of the 'managerial/State' model and the 'continuous policy cycle process' model were explored and critiqued (see: Ball *et al*., 2011; Bowe *et al*., 1992; Braun *et al*., 2010; Dale,1989). Next, the discourse of performativity was explored through particular definitions and critiques of popular interpretations of the concept. The purpose of presenting the nuances in the definition of performativity is to provide clarity on the working definition used in this thesis (Ball, 2003, 2013; Lyotard, 1984; Munday, 2014). Furthermore, in order to appreciate how performative techniques and discourse are embedded in the practices of the FE sector, understandings of the notion of accountability presented. The literature presents differing interpretations of accountability and how the word accountability is used to position the

teaching professional as responsible for student outputs, as well as stating how the teacher becomes a subject of externally enforced measures of accountability (NCTL, 2012; Poulson, 1998; Ranson, 2003). The chapter then moved on to explore the discourse of professionalism; what is important to note is that the literature presents the existence of several discourses in operation, supporting the idea that levels of agency are executed in the aligning of a teacher to a particular discourse (Bathmaker & Avis, 2013; Shain & Gleeson, 1999). To assist in understandings around how teachers might be susceptible to one discourse over another, Englund and Gerdin's (2019) research on the psychological mechanisms provides some useful considerations. The chapter concludes by considering the social characteristic of interest to this thesis, by exploring the nomenclature associated with conditions such as dyslexia and dyspraxia. The substantive matter of teachers with SpLDs is explored in literature regarding experiences of disclosure by teachers with SpLDs and the employment of resilience strategies (Bradley, Danielson & Hallahan, 2002; Burns & Bell, 2011; Burns, Poikkeus & Aro, 2013; Macleod & Cebula, 2009; O'Dwyer & Thorpe, 2013).

In Chapter 2 the key conceptualisations of the policy process, policy techniques and performativity are presented with the intention of providing an insight into the workings of the FE sector. This is in order to shed some light on the influences, techniques and discourses at play which have shaped and continue to shape the FE sector. The next chapter, Chapter 3, focuses solely on the historical context of the FE sector, in order to provide an understanding of how the techniques and discourse of performativity and accountability evolved and became embedded in the policy and practice of the FE sector. It is only once the contextual history of the FE sector is appreciated that a rich and holistic understanding can be reached on how a particular set of circumstances have framed the need for the research in this thesis.

# Chapter 3: Further Education – Post 1992

## 3.1 Introduction

A central tenet of the current literature depicts the FE sector as an incoherent and inconsistent sector, blighted by frequent changes to structural factors and neglected by successive governments in their joint failure to provide a clear curriculum for the FE sector (Bailey & Unwin, 2014; Lucas & Crowther, 2016; Smith, 2015). In addition, it is proposed in the current literature that the FE sector experienced a cultural shift from social-democratic principles to neo-liberal dogma following the 1993 process of incorporation, (see Fisher, 2010; Gleeson & Shain, 1999; Lucas & Crowther, 2016; Simmons & Thompson, 2008). Both positions will be presented, explored, and where necessary challenged, in an attempt to provide a historical understanding and to situate the research presented in this thesis into the context of the FE sector. The chapter begins with an historical account from the 1944 Education Act onwards, with the intention of tracing the roots of the inconsistencies that are prevalent in the FE sector (see Bailey & Unwin, 2014; Fisher, 2010; Simmons & Fisher, 2008). From there, the shift in the institutional culture of the FE sector is explored, with particular attention paid to the implications of a new style of management, referred to as New Public Management (NPM) (Lucas & Crowther, 2016; Randle & Brady, 1997). The changing working conditions for teachers within the FE sector in terms of the introduction of a new contract and the increase in the number of taught hours accumulated in rising tensions for the sector (Lucas & Crowther, 2016). The attention paid to the dominate discourses of neo-liberalism and NPM, which governed the era of incorporation, assist in providing the context for some of the more perverse techniques, including the franchising of courses to private companies and attempts to 'play the market' with some colleges engaging in fraudulent activities (Gleeson & Shain, 1999; Lucas & Crowther, 2016). The chapter concludes by completing the picture in examining the current state of the FE sector. The literature documents a sector that is still blighted by government intervention, and sustained cuts to funding (Dennis, 2016).

## 3.2 The FE Sector, inconsistent and incoherent

The 1944 Education Act made it a statutory duty of local government to provide adequate facilities for FE. In their historical account of the FE sector, Bailey and Unwin (2014) draw attention to the fact that although the 1944 Act brought about a statutory duty for Local Education Authorities (LEAs) to provide 'adequate facilities' for FE provision, this never came to full fruition. Sections 41 and 42 of the Act focused on introducing a set curriculum framework for the sector; LEAs were to produce planned frameworks, based on 'schemes of further education' and submit them to the Minister of Education. By 1949 most of the frameworks had been submitted by the LEAs and acknowledged by the Ministry, however, none of the frameworks were signed off by the Minister. This meant that no agreed scheme of work/curriculum would be put into place to provide a framework of further education provision. Interestingly, Bailey and Unwin (2014) argue that the decision to not implement the broader vision of FE, presented in section 41 and 42 of the 1944 Act, resulted in the missed opportunity by the then government to create from the start a statutory curriculum for the FE sector.

The literature on the FE sector from the 1944 Act up until the F&H Act of 1992 is less comprehensive. In part because the F&H Act 1992 is viewed in the literature as the watershed moment for the FE sector. However, it is important to present to the reader what happened during the period of 1944 to1992, in order to provide a comprehensive picture of the extent to which successive governments failed to successfully coordinate the FE sector. Research on creative teaching within a performative FE sector by Simmons and Thompson (2008) examined how further education developed from the 1944 Education Act through to the New Labour government. What is particularly interesting in their account, is the point they raise about the influence of social class on the ability of policy makers to direct the FE sector in a meaningful way. They claim that the association of the FE sector to working class based trades and technical skills is what prevented policy makers from paying much attention to the sector. The lack of personal knowledge or understanding of the FE sector by policy makers, they argue, made them unsuitable to write policy for the FE sector. Consequently, the sector continued to lack the status of schools and remained on the periphery of reformative education policy.

In 1989 the then Conservative Minister for Education, Kenneth Baker, referred to the sector as the Cinderella Sector, alluding to its neglected nature in a keynote speech to the Annual Conference of the Association of Colleges of Further and Higher Education. Baker stated that government investment would ensure an increase of status for the sector and would bring the sector into line with the compulsory education and higher education sectors (Baker cited in Fisher, 2010; fe histories website, 2019). However, according to Fisher (2010) in his examination of the English FE College from 1963-1993 and Simmons and Thompson (2008), interference by the government into FE practice and processes, in particular auditing processes, was already evident by the 1970s. *The Employment and Training Act 1973* introduced the Manpower Services Commission (MSC), and FE colleges were instructed by the MSC to broaden their remit (Fisher, 2010:124). The instruction was to extend the provision to include a greater selection of courses, including 'life skills', general and adult education, and as is argued in some of the literature, as a response to the growing levels of youth employment during the 1970s/1980s. The MSC's role was to coordinate the interests of industry, local authorities and education; they were also responsible for funding approximately 25 per cent of work-related FE. As a consequence of the devolved funding power, LEAs became increasingly vulnerable to central government scrutiny. Concerns were raised by central government during the 1980s as to the inefficiencies and inconsistencies in terms of the quality of FE sector education. However, Fisher, (2010), in reference to Gray (1992), argues that although the government stated effectiveness of provision would be considered alongside addressing matters of efficiency, the attention given to efficiency far outweighed that of effectiveness. In 1988 the Further Education Unit (FEU) released a number of introductory reports which focused on summarising the development of quality assurance processes suitable for auditing performance. In 1990, following a large scale survey to capture what quality assurance process were being used by FE colleges, Sallis (1990), according to Fisher (2010), reported that ninety five colleges - thirty nine per cent of the respondents - were using the British Standard (BS) 5750 quality assurance system, although not all the colleges rolled it out college wide. Eighty six colleges, thirty five per cent of the respondents, were using Total Quality Management (TQM), while seventy nine colleges were developing their own quality assurance process (Gray, 1992; Sallis, 1990, cited in

Fisher, 2010; Simmons & Thompson, 2008). Of note, despite central government attention to efficiency, the FE sector went into the 1990s still being viewed as the Cinderella Sector with no clear direction in terms of its curriculum or remit.

The 1992 H&FE Act marked the end of LEA control over further education; the responsibility for funding the FE sector went to the newly formed Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) and General Further Education Colleges (GFECs) and Sixth Form Colleges (SFCs) became accountable to the FEFC. On the 1st of April 1993 the process known as incorporation began, which meant that GFECs and SFCs 'became self-governing institutions' (Simmons, 2008). Each college became a separate 'incorporation', responsible for management of staff and students, their own finances, and wider business matters, including marketing (Lucas & Crowther, 2016). Funding would no longer be provided by local authorities, instead colleges would now have to compete with each other in order to be rewarded funding from the FEFC. Interestingly, it was not until 1993 following the introduction of the 1992 F&H Act, that SFCs became grouped with GFECs under the catchall term FE (Briggs, 2005). SFCs, according to Briggs (2005), had evolved during the 1960s out of school sixth forms, with the intent of replacing smaller school sixth forms with larger, more centralised provision. Simmons (2008) states that the process of incorporation signalled a new system for FE in England, resulting in a 'national' system of FE.

Although it could be argued that the 1992 Act introduced a system for FE in terms of the business/operational side of the FE sector, it did little to provide any clear framework in terms of a curriculum remit or 'role' for the FE sector (Bailey & Unwin, 2014). In addition, Green (2013), Smith and O'Leary (2015) make the argument that the 'ideological commitment to marketisation' by successive governments since incorporation has led to the country falling further behind in the acquisition of the necessary skills to compete in a global market. This point is developed further by Green, who argues that despite the introduction of a number of policy initiatives which focused on vocational education, and the subsequent structural changes since incorporation, the FE sector has remained uncoordinated and incoherent (Green, 2013). The introduction of

the General National Vocational Qualification (1984) and Modern Apprenticeship (2001), whilst giving a basic framework, did not suffice in providing a distinct FE curriculum or role for the FE sector in terms of education provision. Added to this, as Green states, is the matter of key structural changes to the funding of the FE sector. Since 1992 the FE sector has had four different funding bodies: from 1992-2001 the FEFC, from 2001-2010 the Learning Skills Council, from 2010-2017 the Skills Funding Agency, and from April 2017 the Education and Skills Funding Agency.

The lack of a consistent funding body for the FE sector could explain the continued absence of a coordinated approach to FE education across the sector. In the next sub-heading neo-liberalism and the NPM are explored and considered as points from which performative practice and discourse became accelerated (Fisher, 2010).

## 3.3 Institutional cultural change

It is argued in much of the literature on GFECs that incorporation created a habitat in which New Public Management (NPM) became the prevalent discourse across the FE sector. For clarity, NPM is at times referred to in the literature as 'new managerialism'. Helpfully, Randle and Brady (1997) refer to Pollitt's (1990) useful explanation of NPM, 'as a generic package of management techniques' that may include: the use of quantitative performance indicators; the development of consumerism; and greater flexible working relations in the form of a casual and temporary staff contracts. It is these techniques, Pollitt argues, that underpin the belief that 'good management' can deliver the 'three "Es" of economy, efficiency and effectiveness, resulting in a reduction of wasting taxpayers' money (Metcalf & Richards, 1987, cited in Randle & Brady; Pollitt, 1990, cited in Randle & Brady, 1997:125). In reference to Clarke and Newman (1994), Lucas and Crowther (2016) argue that 'incorporation' and what followed was 'experimental'. They claim that the FE sector post 1992 was a testing ground for new public sector management to be applied to the wider public sector. Lucas and Crowther (2016), in reference to Hodgson and Spours (2015), explain further by stating:

> Such an experiment in FE was possible because it was politically marginalised, strategically 'unconnected'… In many respects, this reflected the division between academic and vocational education. FE took those students that other institutions did not want. Therefore, policies carried out in the FE sector would have been politically inconceivable in schools or universities at the time (Hodgson & Spours, 2015, cited in Lucas & Crowther, 2016: 586).

There are some common and reoccurring themes evident in the literature on NPM discourse. Attention will be paid to two of the themes: the first is the consequence of competition on the FE sector, and the second the decline in the industrial relations of FE teaching staff since 1992. These two themes have been selected as they best demonstrate the disconnection between what governments and policy makers may perceive are the benefits of a NPM approach, and the reality of a sector ill-equipped to operate under a type of management moulded out of neoliberal ideology. For the purpose of contextualising the two themes a brief overview of neo-liberalism will be presented. Lucas and Crowther (2016) succinctly explain the 'wider neoliberal logic' of the 1980s and 1990s, stating that the policies set about a process of reversing the 'social market economy' of post-war Britain. The emphasis of neo-liberal policy was on removing dependency on the state in favour of promoting an unregulated market, where 'individual responsibility and competition' were the key drivers (Hall & O'Shea, 2013). Interestingly, the first theme draws on the detrimental effect of competition on the FE sector.

Paradoxically, following incorporation, colleges were encouraged to compete in a similar way to how a company might compete for business in the private sector. However, as Lucas and Crowther (2016) point out, it was the incorporation process itself that prevented colleges from competing in the truest sense of 'free market' principles. They state that there is no 'free market' in FE education as colleges cannot determine their own price and sector funding is controlled by the government. In reference to Lucas and Mace (1999) they state that the FE sector operates within a 'quasi-market' – 'a market underpinned of necessity by government regulation and finance' (Lucas & Mace, 1999, cited in Lucas & Crowther, 2016: 588). NPM techniques were justified under the ideological assumption that the 'quasi-market' would

improve student choice and experience. Such an assumption can be challenged, as the drive for FE colleges to compete resulted in colleges becoming increasingly siloed, and other colleges were viewed as competitors, not colleagues or partners (Lucas & Crowther, 2016).

Improvements in student 'choice' and 'experience' are contested in much of the literature. In particular one of the key concerns centres on the 'quality' of education since incorporation. A reduction in contact teaching hours and the franchising of some courses to private companies are cited as some of the more disconcerting measures of the NPM culture. The arrangement between Halton College and Tesco's, for Tesco's to provide an NVQ level one in shelf filling for the sum of ten million is often documented in the literature. More concerning are the examples of colleges who attempted to 'play the market' by engaging in financial irregularities and in some instances fraudulent activities. The most disconcerting is the mismanagement scandal at Derby College, Wilmorton: the College was found to have been using funding it received from the FEFC to support ventures such as a city centre nightclub. The nightclub has since gone bankrupt and the Principal and the entire governing body were dismissed for fraudulent activities. By 1999 at least five other colleges had received damning reports from the FEFC about the management of their finances (Gleeson & Shain, 1999; Lucas & Crowther, 2016).

The second theme, points to the decline of industrial relations between teaching staff and senior leadership teams in FE colleges. Following incorporation, the working conditions of staff were determined on a local level by the incorporated college management team. This development led to greater inconsistency in terms of pay, the number of contact teaching hours, and other variations in the terms and conditions of employment contracts. Attention is drawn by Lucas and Crowther (2016) to the 'ambiguous' and paradoxical position of FE teaching staff, although the conditions of work for FE teachers are set at a local level, they still qualify for a teacher public sector pension. Such an observation highlights the disconnection between the ethos of incorporation and government policy. The working conditions for many teachers in the FE sector became increasingly precarious from 1994 onwards as the drive for 'efficiency' led to some college management teams introducing a more 'modernised' contract – one that could

adapt more easily to the demands of an incorporated college business model. The introduction of the 'modernised' contract was made easier by a timely piece of trade union legislation, *Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992*, which inhibited national trade union action by FE teaching unions. The act prevented a coordinated and unified response for FE teacher union members (*Trade Union & Relations Act 1992*).

Individual colleges were further siloed as a result of their industrial action disputes over working conditions, leading to protracted local industrial action. According to Lucas and Crowther (2016) over 200 local disputes were recorded in 1995 as redundancies grew. The situation was exacerbated further by the decision of some college management teams to use part-time agency staff who were often not qualified teachers. There were instances of some colleges using non-teaching staff in the guise of 'instructor' or 'demonstrator'. Not only did this blur the boundaries between teaching and support, it could also be argued that it undermined the notion of what it is to be a teaching professional. It is perplexing to consider that by 2005 'learning support workers' accounted for 1 in 5 of the workforce (Robson, 2006, cited in Lucas & Crowther, 2016).

Much of the literature points to the 1992 F&HE Act as the point from which neo-liberal ideas and NPM principles became entrenched into the FE sector. However what is disputed by some researchers, such as Fisher (2010), is that the measures were new. In addition, Fisher makes some interesting points by arguing that incorporation was the starting point of 'acceleration' of a process that had begun thirty years before. In support of the argument, he refers to a study known as the Manchester Study, conducted during the late 1950s and early 1960s that concerned itself with the increased levels of administration in technical colleges. Fisher argues that the Manchester Study findings paint a very different picture to the resplendent account of the pre-1993 'golden years' depicted in much of the literature on the FE sector. Attention is drawn to the existence of performative measurement techniques and an established management culture that prevailed long before incorporation (Fisher, 2010; Simmons, 2008).

In the next sub-heading the FE sector continues to be examined, attention is paid to government policy and practice post 1997. As before, the literature depicts the FE sector as one that is blighted by government intervention through policy reform and funding cuts (Bassey, 2014; Dennis, 2016).

## 3.4 The FE sector post 1997

It is argued in some of the literature that the New Labour government from 1997-2010 made attempts to reintroduce initiatives in keeping with social-democratic principles, such as the introduction of Educational Maintenance Allowance (EMA) in 2001 for students from low income families (see Lucas & Crowther, 2016; Orr, 2009). However, the performance driven audit culture continued, and according to Orr (2009) accelerated with the introduction of workforce initiatives such as, the statutory duty for teachers to complete thirty professional development (CPD) hours per annum. CPD was the responsibility of the Institute for Learning (IfL), a professional body for teachers established by the New Labour government in 2002 to record and enforce statutory duty. What is of interest to note, according to Orr, is the disconnection between the policy lever of the CPD initiative to increase professional development amongst teachers in the FE sector, and Orr's research findings, which suggest that paradoxically the lever weakened the professional autonomy of teachers, and had scant effect on the practice of teachers.

The literature on the FE sector from 2010 in reference to government intervention is less comprehensive; however what the available literature does indicate is that the sector continues to be susceptible to government intervention and turbulence. Lucas and Crowther (2016) argue the 'demand led system introduced by Labour' was sustained throughout the period of the Coalition government, which came into power in 2010 (Lucas & Crowther, 2016:590). In addition, they point to changes in expenditure, and the introduction of what they describe as the 'politics of austerity' (Lucas & Crowther, 2016:590). Of note, and in reference to the above point made in relation to competition between schools and colleges, funding was withdrawn from the

14-19 school/college Diploma collaboration, Lucas and Crowther stated the 'duty to collaborate' had been ignored by the 'school policy field'. More troubling was the abolishment of the EMA in England, a measure put in place by New Labour to support learners in education, (Lucas & Crowther, 2016).

Furthermore, deregulation led to greater instability for the FE teaching professional. Following a review of professionalism in the FE sector, chaired by Lord Lingfield (2012), a report was published recommending a continuation of the 'dominant trend of government policy…towards de-regulation' in the revoking of The 2007 Regulations (BIS, March, 2012:4). The interim report argued the organisations which had existed at the point the 2007 regulations were conceived, such as the Learning Skills Council (LSC), and Lifelong Learning UK (LLUK) no longer existed, leading to difficulties in regulating the 2007 regulations (BIS, March, 2012:4). Gleeson *et al*. (2015) argue the deregulation of teacher education provision, and in particular, the shift from College and HE partnerships, to employers managing teacher education, could lead to greater 'micromanagement of professionalism in the classroom and workplace' (Gleeson *et al.*, 2015:80).

Of particular interest to this thesis, are the concerns raised by Gleeson *et al*. (2015) in relation to the Commission on Adult Vocational Teaching and Learning (CATVL) (2013) role in contributing to government reform. They argue there is little evidence of the 'important contextual issues that shape the lived experience of practitioners' particular around matters to do with workforce reform documented in the Lingfield Report (2012) (Gleeson *et al*., 2015:85-86). The crux of the matter for Gleeson *et al*. (2015) appears to be in the lack of appreciation of the nuanced experiences of FE professionals, arguing the experience of FE professionals tends to be 'less linear than those entering school and HE', with many FE professionals entering teaching with expertise and qualifications, alongside prior experience of working with young people (Gleeson *et al*., 2015:80).

Hanley and Orr (2019) also draw attention to contextual factors, in reflecting on three decades of ill placed and ill-conceived policy reforms, they stress it is unlikely the Post-16 Skills Plan

which promises major reforms for vocational education in England will succeed. They argue there is one particular reason for the likely failure, and that is, 'expectations are poorly aligned with the position or potential of the existing VET teaching workforce to enact the reforms' (Hanley & Orr, 2019: 104). Further concerns around the deregulation of initial teacher education (ITE) are shared by Esmond and Wood (2017) who state deregulation has prevented the prospect of a teacher trained workforce, nor provided 'any identifiable route to subject expertise' – the changes they argue have resulted in the reduction of qualified teachers in the FE sector (Esmond & Wood, 2017:233).

In a seminar paper written by Hodgson and Spours (2017), as part of a UK wide inquiry into FE skills policy and practice (Hodgson & Spours, 2019), they encourage the practice of readers to consider the historical context of the FE sector, to view FE through a 'system lens rather than through the rhetoric of official policy' (Hodgson & Spours, 2017:2). They argue that since the 1990s FE in England has been determined through 'marketisation and national policy levers' leading to a reactive rather than proactive FE sector in England (Hodgson & Spours, 2017:2).

Hodgson and Spours (2017) point to the impact of government policy post 2010 for the falling numbers in the English FE sector, albeit they state the proportion of 16-18 year olds in attendance has only slightly declined, there has however been a 'dramatic' drop in adult participation. They describe the policy approach since 2010 as an 'extreme Anglo Saxon Model', in reference to Sahlberg, (2007), the Anglo Saxon Model is stated as concerned with standardised curriculum, testing regimes; top down accountability measures; and institutional competition and choice (Sahlberg, 2007, cited in Hodgson & Spours, 2017:5). It could be argued, the return to linear A Levels for academic subjects, demonstrates a more 'traditional' position to summative assessment, with all exams taking place at the end of a two year A Level course.

Furthermore, according to Hodgson and Spours (2017), GFE and SFC are competing against new providers, such as Free Schools, Technical Colleges etc. Interestingly, it is noted by the authors the continuation of reform and new competition is happening within the backdrop of

more centralised policy and governance with the formation of a 'single ministry and funding body, with a powerful role for the inspectorate (Ofsted)' (Hodgson & Spours, 2017:6). Another point of interest to this thesis is the acknowledgement by Hodgson and Spours (2017) that none of the changes resulted in an 'independent curriculum body' for the English FE sector. This point echoes that of Bailey and Unwin's (2014) earlier criticism that the 1944 Act did not lead to the introduction a clear remit for the FE sector in the form of a curriculum framework.

In addition, there are some further interesting observations made by Dennis (2016) in their review of post-2010 literature on the FE sector. Of note Dennis, like Lucas and Crowther (2016), point to the post-2010 period as one of austerity and deregulation. One of the key concerns highlighted by both is the commitment - in place since 2010 - of the two Conservative governments to funding reductions in the FE sector. In reference to Keep (2014), Dennis (2016) argues that due to funding cuts, by 2018 'FE will experience an accumulated budget loss of 43 per cent' (Keep, 2014, cited in Dennis, 2016:117). More troubling is the reference made by Dennis to the Association of Colleges (AoC) claim in 2015 that the FE sector is in a crisis situation. The AoC stated that by the end of the second Conservative government term, it is likely that adult funded education will cease to exist (AoC, 2015, cited in Dennis, 2016). Of interest, a briefing document produced by the *House of Commons Library* (2019) on college funding found a 'funding dip' for FE sector 16-19 students compared to that of secondary school age students. In reference to the Institute for Fiscal Studies 2018 annual report, the briefing stated:

> Spending per student in an FE or sixth-form college is now about 8% lower than spending per pupil in secondary schools, having been 50% greater at the start of the 1990s… 16-18 education in England has been the big loser in from education spending changes over the last 25 years… being one of the few areas of education spending to see cuts since 2010 (IFS, 2018 cited in HoCL briefing, 2019)

The briefing is disconcerting, especially as the sector has experienced some major reforms to education policy with the introduction of a return to linear A Levels. Funding cuts at a time of major reform will have undoubtedly placed great stress and pressure on those that work and

operate within the FE sector. The A Level reform policy was the brainchild of Michael Gove, the Secretary of State for Education between May 2010 and July 2014. The available literature documents Gove as someone who took no heed to the views of teachers and academics. A *New Statesman* article in October 2015 goes as far as to refer to him as 'the polite assassin' (Leslie, 2015). Gove was documented as favouring more traditional didactic styles of teaching, interestingly a juxtaposition to the Ofsted framework which expects teachers to employ appropriate teaching and learning techniques to suit the student body (Bassey, 2014; Ofsted, 2019). This might go some way to explaining why the re-introduction of the Linear A Level, with all assessments at the end of the second year and predominately assessed by exams, was brought in under Gove's tenure. Bassey (2014) argues the A Level reform was rushed through before the next general election in 2015.

> His [Gove's] attempt to replace GCSE in English, Mathematics, science, history, geography and a language by a more demanding Baccalaureate failed, but instead he managed to raise the bar in GCSE and A-Level examinations and change the grading system. Instead of basing such major changes on political consensus and professional support, Michael Gove rushed it, eschewing trials, in order to make it a fait accompli before the next general election (Bassey, 2014:418).

Since Gove, there have been a further four education ministers in a five year period up to Gavin Williamson appointed Secretary for State in July 2019. The constant churn of education ministers, and the continued downturn in funding for the FE sector perpetuates an inconsistent and incoherent sector, one that looks set to continue as such.

## 3.5 Summary

The context of the FE sector documented in Chapter 3, along with the exploration of the key conceptualisations of the policy process, policy techniques and performativity in Chapter 2, provide the necessary backdrop for the research presented from Chapter 4 onwards. The research in this thesis as outlined in Chapter 1, moves beyond identifying the policy actor positions stated in the research by Ball *et al.* (2011) and explores the notion of a policy actor

from a tabular rasa approach in as much as no policy actor position is assigned to any particular behaviour. Of greater interest to this thesis is how the policy actors at both a micro and meso level navigate and interconnect with the FE sector policy process. In addition, the teacher with SpLDs is not differentiated from the rest of the policy actors; instead they are situated within the role of policy actor. This thesis argues that it is only once you start to examine policy actors from a homogenous status that the inquiry will unearth any heterogeneity in the experiences and actions of the policy actors. Furthermore, in viewing policy actors as the same this inquiry, through capturing the experiences of policy actors in qualitative interviews, will be better able to draw conclusions on the possible construction of teachers with SpLDs as subjects.

In addition, the research explores the policy cycle process by drawing out from the policy actor participants their interpretations of the level of agency they exercise in policy decisions. The 'continuous policy cycle process' (Bowe *et al*., 1992; Braun *et al*., 2010) provides a theoretical position from which this thesis explores the practice of policy at both the micro and meso levels of policy engagement in the FE sector.

The next chapter, Chapter 4, provides a holistic overview of the research inquiry, as well as explanations of the research execution and analysis. Chapter 4 begins with an overview of the research design, setting the parameters of the interpretivist research. Explanations are provided regarding the necessity to adopt qualitative methods in order to appreciate that social science research is 'context dependent' (Baskarada & Koronios, 2018). The chapter then moves on to explain the approach taken in the interview schedule, addressing both ethical and practical elements in the stating of requiring a signed consent form and the use of aids, such as a digital recorder. There is some reflexivity shared in the acknowledgment that as the researcher is neurodiverse, with hindsight it might have been useful to adopt some of the phenomenological techniques, such as a 'sensitizing exercise' or to 'bracket out' (Finlay, 2002). From there the chapter clearly defines the research participant sample and method. The policy actor role is defined in reference to Braun *et al*. (2010) with the intent of explaining the methodology of including a wider sample of policy actor participants from the breadth of the FE

sector. After which, the data analysis process is shared including an explanation of the sixteen stage methodical process adopted in the drawing out of themes. The data analysis is drawn from thematic analysis techniques (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Watts, 2013) but is extended in the use of the sixteen stage approach, which is described in detail. The chapter concludes with an appreciation of the ethical considerations required, with attention paid to guidance from both the British Education Research Association (BERA) and British Sociological Association (BSA).

# Chapter 4: Research Methodology:  Overview of research design

## 4.1 Introduction

The research methodology and design is taken from the epistemological standpoint of the interpretivist paradigm. The research sample population included two FE colleges, and relevant agencies, organisations and departments that are part of the FE sector; including participants who worked, or who had previously worked in a membership organisation, government department, teaching union and the like. At this junction it is important to note the unit of analysis is the individual participant and not the FE colleges, FE relevant agencies, organisations, or departments.

As the aim and objectives of this research are concerned with exploring the contribution of policy techniques, policy process and performativity in the construction of teachers with SpLDs as subjects in the English FE sector. It was not possible to predict who the key policy actors might be. Therefore, the interview sample population was selected based on the logic that policy enactment is not a privilege reserved for politicians; Bowe *et al*. (1992) argue that all who are engaged in the policy cycle process, from teachers to politicians, are policy actors. However, by identifying key people in specific positions within both the colleges and the FE sector organisations and agencies, it became apparent how far the process of enquiry needed to go.

In order to start the process of enquiry an initial purposive sample technique was adopted, of this sample, teachers with SpLDs volunteered to take part in the semi-structured interviews. The participation of those teachers with SpLDs turned out to be a fortuitous one as their accounts in particular emphasised the notion of the ‘cult of the performative teacher’, a concept that will be explained in Chapter 7 of this thesis. In addition, the purposive sample technique was extended to include the sending of speculative emails to a number of individuals, institutions and organisations, who either worked directly in the FE sector, or who were perceived to have some connection, working relationship, and/or contribution to the generation,

implementation or enactment of education policy in England. Additional policy actor participants were recommended through the technique of 'snowball' sampling following the initial policy actor sample of participants; visits to organisation(s) and institution(s) to meet individuals and staff groups was also a fruitful way to solicit participants to take part in the research.

The next sub-heading will explore the interpretivist paradigm and provide justifications as to why the approach was necessary to the inquiry.

## 4.2 Interpretivist inquiry

The research inquiry is situated within the interpretivist paradigm. Interpretivist research concerns itself with how individuals' as social actors interpret meaning, and make sense of the world around them. However, Baskarada and Koronious (2018) note Taylor's (1980) reflections on the difficulty of defining meaning, and conclude that meanings are subjective, and in addition 'can only make sense in relation to other meanings' (Baskarda & Koronious 2018:12). Nonetheless, it is hoped that within the rippling and interconnecting interpretation of meaning a greater understanding of how the participants view themselves and others as policy actors will come to light. The overarching aim of social science researchers who favour interpretivist methods is to elicit what Weber (1949) referred to as verstehen (hermeneutical understanding). The social reality of the policy actors in how they navigate through performative discourse, tools and techniques required an approach that could capture verstehen; one which would allow participants to share all the vagaries and nuances of their experiences (Weber, 1949, cited in Baskarada and Koronios, 2018). In addition, Baskarada and Koronios (2018) draw attention to the fact that social science research is 'context dependent', and as such positivist methods such as a quantitative questionnaires may fail to capture the insights, nuances, and circumstances that surround the site of inquiry. In order to explore the conception of teachers as 'key policy actors' in the policy cycle process, qualitative interviews provided the opportunity for participants to share their experiences, with the addition of capturing the set of circumstances in which the experience took place.

Unlike positivism, intepretivism is not concerned with making nomological predictions/laws, but instead is interested in human agency. Gadamer and Fantel (1975) define interpretation as 'reflexive posture towards tradition, which refuses to naively follow traditionally assumed values and truths' (Gadamer and Fantel, 1975, cited in Baskarada and Koronios, 2018:12). Conversely, one of the more prevailing criticisms of interpretivist research, one that particularly plagues critical social science research, is the accusation that research is value laden. The crux of the issue lies in the belief that value judgments based on the researchers political or theoretical beliefs, have far reaching implications in the design, execution, analysis and presentation of the research. Feminist research in particular has experienced scrutiny and accusations of a lack of objectivity (Wylie, 1992, cited in Baskarada and Koronios, 2018:13). In challenge to the value judgement proposition, the research presented in this thesis in reference to Belenky *et al*. (1988) notion of 'women's way of knowing', argues the value of myself as a neurodiverse researcher, with a background in education, has aided the design in terms of deciding on whom to interview and what questions should be asked. My own 'neurodiverse way of knowing' challenged assumptions made in the policy rhetoric surrounding the Equality Opportunities Act (2010) and government schemes such as the 'Access to Work' scheme that any work placed implications for neurodiverse teachers would or could be addressed.

Paradoxically the natural sciences, from which positivism derives, subject to similar questions of objectivity. It is argued that scientists do not randomly choose the problems they investigate, they are often selected based on a particular interest. Furthermore, Baskarada and Koronios (2018) argue that positivism as a paradigm still dominates much of social science research; they argue that a consequence of this stance is a lack of research that engages with human agency, and one which lacks 'critical self-reflection'. The intention of the research in this thesis is to do just that, to engage with human agency; in reference to Denzin (2016) it hopes to 'engage in ethical work that makes a positive difference... and hence open to change and transformation' (Denzin, 2016, cited in Baskarada and Koronios, 2018:14). In a further

challenge, Watts (2013) states it could be argued that science is not a suitable standard to measure qualitative research against – most importantly because qualitative research is not 'trying to *perform* [author emphasis] the same functions as quantitative research' (Watts, 2013:1). In addition, Watts (2013) in reference to Harre (2004) claims that both the natural sciences and qualitative research share a commonality in that the descriptions offered by the two disciplines 'are intellectual constructions' carried out by individual researchers whom formulate the questioning activities. Therefore, neither the natural sciences nor interpretivist research could be described as 'neutral or value-free' (Watts 2013:1).

The next sub-heading documents the use of semi-structured interviews, including the overarching headings that shaped the interview schedule used in the execution of the interviews. Practical considerations are addressed in the use of recording equipment, and the managing of interviews to ensure participants did not veer too far in their responses from the site of the inquiry.

## 4.3 Qualitative semi-structured interviews

Qualitative semi-structured interviews were selected as an appropriate method, as the intention of the interviews was to explore the everyday practices of the participants. In particular, to gather insight into how the participants navigate through and around performance based education policy. The semi-structured nature of the interview format provides the necessary scope for the participant to share their 'reality' while confining the limits of the inquiry to a particular phenomenon. The semi-structured interviews were closer to the unstructured form allowing the interviewees to fully express their thoughts and opinions on the matter. Nonetheless, a consistent methodological approach was executed in the process of contacting participants, in the planning of the interview schedule, and most notably in the tools and techniques used in the process of the data analysis – all of which are presented below.

The interview schedule was comprised of key questions, ordered under nine overarching

headings:

1. Role in the life of the participant: what they did

2. Policy process: their experience of policy

3. Benefits of performance measures

4. Teacher professionalism

5. Neurodiversity in the form of specific learning differences: SpLDs

6. Consultation process: their involvement in policy as a policy actor

7. Outcomes/outputs: quality assurance v quality improvement

8. Performance: performance management

9. Wider discussion: other points raised by participants

The headings themselves correlate with the research objectives (Chapter 1.4) and the parameters deemed necessary in order to satisfy the exploration of specific understandings of policy techniques, policy processes and performativity. In addition, the semi-structured format enabled me as the researcher to modify the line of enquiry as and when necessary (Robson, 2002).

The interviews provided the opportunity to address the two research objectives, in particular the use of open ended questions provided the participants the opportunity to rationalise and explain the perceived benefits, purposes and expectations behind policy from their reality: RO1. For RO2, the interviews provided some insight into whom the key policy actors might be and what role they may play in the construction of teachers with SpLDs as subjects. Furthermore, the interviews with teachers who disclosed they were neurodiverse provided the opportunity for the participants to reflect on the policy effects of performativity and whether they believe that performativity discourse subjugates them as teachers with a SpLD.

Before the start of each interview, participants were asked to read through again the consent

form - a template of the form had already been sent ahead of the interview for their information - and requested to sign the form (Appendix F). Permission was sought for the interview to be recorded using a digital recording and all participants were informed they would receive a copy of their transcribed interview for them to reflect on. Interviews were recorded using an Olympus, Digital Voice Recorder DM-670, with the additional tool of a separate small unobtrusive microphone for the purpose of enhancing the sound quality of the audio file. No participants objected to the use of the recording device. A notebook was also brought in to the interview room with pre-planned headings summarising the overarching headings referred to above. There were some small adjustments to the headings depending on the participant, but in the main they were summarised in the following: Roles; Policy & Teaching and Learning; Policy process/contribution; Performance; Teaching professionals; SpLD. At the top of the page was the date and time of the interview and the participant pseudonym identifier.

During the interview, key points were noted down under each heading. In addition, the headings acted as a prompt for me to remember the pre-planned questions. Albeit, the interview questions were kept loose enough to enable the participant freedom to develop points made, and to provide me as the researcher the licence to explore points of interest raised by the participants. Key interview questions (Appendix A) had been planned in advance governed by the overall research questions and objectives, and prompts and probes were planned in advance to aid the interview, although it was not always necessary to exercise them; on occasions additional or replacement probes and prompts were used.

Some appreciation was paid to the context of where the interview would be taking place and with whom. The interview schedule plan was tailored to appreciate the four types of participant: Principal/SLT members; middle/line managers; teachers with SpLDs and FE sector experts (see Appendix A). Interview duration was determined by participant availability and ranged from forty minutes to one hour and fifteen minutes. As the sample population was drawn from adults in middle and senior management in Further Education colleges and those in equivalent levels in the FE sector of organisations and agencies, it was not expected that matters of literacy and

linguistic ability would be an obstacle. However, at times during the interviews it was necessary to clarify some questions and defining of terms used.

Once participants were comfortable, all interviews began with what was perceived as an 'easy' opening question: 'tell me about your role(s)?' or 'what is a typical day in the life of…' The 'ease' of the question was challenged by more than one senior leadership participant who declared the question to be quite a difficult one, not from the perspective that the participant was unaware of what their role was, and what it required. Difficulty was found in summarising a normative day; this was particularly pronounced for the current principals and vice principal participants. Notwithstanding, the opening question on the role(s) of the participant provided a gateway into questions governed by the policy and consultation process headings. Once the interview had run its course, participants were asked whether they wanted to add anything else, and whether they had predicted the questions asked. In addition, they were asked if there was anything they expected to be asked about but were not and whether they would like to add anything further that they believed might be of interest.

At the beginning of the research process I made the decision to declare my own SpLD status during the participant recruitment process. In addition, I felt it important to share that I had worked in the FE sector as both a teacher and manager, and that I still identified myself as a teacher, even though I had taken a break from teaching to complete this thesis. Part of the reasons for doing so are explained in my brief biography in Chapter 1, but also I wanted to communicate to the participants that I understood to some extent the context in which they operated. Furthermore, by my own experience I had acquired a level of legitimacy to explore matters relating to performance measures and the implications for teachers with SpLDs. However, as the research inquiry progressed it became apparent to me that my own understanding of being dyslexic 'deepened and took shape' (Ellis, *et al*. 1997, cited in Finlay, 2002:541). The more I listened to the experiences of participants regarding how they navigated through the routines and expectations of performative discourse and practice, I became more reflexive about the management of my own SpLD diagnosis, and how I managed as a teaching

professional the expectations of performative policy.

In hindsight, the reflexive techniques of to 'bracket out' or to write a 'sensitizing exercise' would have been beneficial at the inception stage of this empirical research. Finlay (2002) refers to the work of phenomenologists and states the first task of a researcher is to 'bracket out' their own beliefs so 'they can attend genuinely and actively to the participants view' (Finlay, 2002:537). The 'sensitizing exercise' follows a similar vein; the idea is for the researcher to dispel as best they can any presumptions they might have of a particular phenomenon, so as to not impose them on the participants (Fisher & Wertz, 1979, cited in Finlay, 2002:537). It is difficult to see how the exercise of to 'bracket out' or to write a 'sensitizing exercise' could result in a tabula rasa, particularly when the researcher has a somewhat 'insider' view of the phenomenon they are researching. Therefore, the research approach in this thesis would not be described as phenomenological in the purist sense. Notwithstanding, techniques that could be described as phenomenological organically emerged during the interviews with participants. This was in part to do with the fact that participants were already aware of my professional background and my SpLD status, and so benefitted from not having to explain certain policy and policy techniques, such as value added measures, as I was already familiar with the terms, and to some extent how they worked.

The advantage of being familiar with the context and presenting myself as an 'insider' resulted in the interviews taking on a more 'interactive' stance. Kiesinger and Tilmann-Healy (1997) describe an 'interactive interview' as one in which the researcher and the participants explore experiences by sharing 'their stories in the context of a developing relationship' (Kiesinger & Tilmann-Healy, 1997, cited in Finlay, 2002:539). The technique of sharing experiences was not a contrived one, I unconsciously approached them as my own people, particularly when interviewing participants from the two FE colleges (Hayano, 1979, cited in Denzin & Lincoln, 2003:209).

I was careful not to dominate the conversation however I did on occasion find myself empathising with participants. I found by using my own experiences sparingly, participants relaxed more and sustained engagement throughout the duration of the interview; this was evidenced by participants volunteering to continue with the interview past the previously agreed time period.

Critiques of the interactive approach shared by Denzin and Lincoln (2003) would call for caution during qualitative interviewing, to refrain from 'getting involved in a "real" conversation', in which the researcher answers questions asked of them, or provides opinions or experiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003:86). To counter argue, I would suggest that some circumspection by the researcher as to what they contribute is all that is necessary. During the interviews, I avoided sharing my opinions and thoughts on the key research questions of the inquiry; it was important to evade what Denzin and Lincoln (2003) refer to as "getting trapped" and to honour the iterative nature of qualitative research by not pre-empting possible conclusions, or to engage in unsubstantiated researcher hearsay. In the interviews I adopted the technique of not "getting trapped" by listening and acknowledging participants questions, but respectfully brought them back to the questions asked.

Notwithstanding, it was important to me as the researcher to appreciate the interview setting, and my own professional and personal biography, while acknowledging I was researching within a site of inquiry that was familiar to me. The ebb and flow of each interview provided opportunity for me to exercise some form of 'give-and-take' empathetic understanding (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003:86), but only as far as it did not cross over in to biasing the responses to key questions of the research inquiry.

At the end of the interview each participant was provided with a participant debrief form (Appendix H) which included a summary of the research, a participant identifier code - for participants to use in any correspondence - and key contact details of the investigator, the

Director of Studies, and the Deputy Director for Research. All participants were advised at the end of the interview that they would receive a typed transcript of the interview for them to reflect on and make any comments. All the participants were satisfied with their transcript, on occasion, spelling or grammatical errors were noted by participants, and corrected. Three participants requested for parts of their transcript not to be published in quote form, but agreed if the points formed part of a theme, or finding; they consented to the position being documented as part of a collective view. Each transcript ranged from between thirteen and nineteen pages of A4 typed, 1.5 spaced, the average being fourteen pages.

In the next sub-heading the sample methodology is explained and detail on how the interviews were conducted and where they took place is provided. The policy actor theory in reference to Bowe *et al*. (1992) and Braun *et al*. (2010) is used to explain the recruitment process of the participants and provide some insight as to why particular policy actor participants were approached.

## 4.4 Research participants

The sample of research participants includes fifteen adult professionals (Table 1.) from within two FE colleges, and the FE sector agencies, organisations and departments in England, and were selected using both purposive and volunteer sampling techniques. Jupp describes purposive sampling as a population that is selected based on a particular characteristic(s); in the case of the research proposed, the characteristic is policy actors within the FE sector (Jupp, 2006). After I attended several staff meetings, permission was granted by the college principals for a college wide email communication to be sent to all staff to solicit their voluntary participation in the empirical research. In addition, during interviews participants suggested other participants whom were in specific roles; subsequently I contacted the person(s) directly to solicit their interest, without disclosing the originator of the suggestion. The opportunity afforded me a third sampling technique referred to as ‘snowball sampling’.

Table 1. Below depicts the alphabetical pseudonym assigned to each participant at the point they were approached to be interviewed. As the assigning was done in order of the potential participants being contacted, there are some gaps in the chronological order. Furthermore, one of the participants, Participant I, requested for their pseudonym letter to be changed as the assigning of the letter by chance happened to be the first letter of their forename. For matters of consistency, and to not risk confusing myself, or disrupting the flow of my processing, I decided to forfeit the aesthetic of a true chronological structure and instead chose to continue to use the original pseudonym assigned to each participant.

Table 1.

| **Participant Identifier** | **Role** | **Setting** |
|---|---|---|
| B | Middle Management (Cross college role)/Line Management (Departmental | FE College |
| C | Middle Management (Cross college role)/Line Management (Departmental | FE College |
| E | Senior Policy Role | Membership Organisation |
| F | Former Principal | FE College |
| G | Former Senior Policy Role | Membership Organisation |
| H | Middle Manager/External Inspection Role | FE College/FE Organisation |
| I | Teacher & Tutor with SpLD | FE College |
| K | Teacher/ Cross College Pastoral Role with SpLD | FE College |
| L | National Role Equality | Membership Organisation |
| M | FE & HE Consultant | Independent |
| N | Principal | FE College |
| O | Principal | FE College |
| P | Vice Principal | FE College |
| Q | Senior Policy Role | Membership Organisation |
| R | Former Policy Officer | Department for Education |

Nine interviews were conducted with participants from two FE colleges, and took place between February 2018 and the end of May 2018. All of the interviews bar two were carried out at the

participant's place of work - the former will be explained shortly. The location of the place of work based interview differed depending on the grade of the participant. Senior managers were fortunate to occupy private offices, whereas for the middle and line managers, and teachers, interviews took place in empty classrooms. This was not an ideal scenario as on more than one occasion an interview was interrupted by someone walking into the room, or we had to relocate due to students waiting to enter the classroom for a taught class to begin.

The two interviews not conducted on college premises took place in two public locations at the convenience of the participant. One interview was carried out in a coffee shop, at a private table some distance from the next table. The atmosphere was relaxed, albeit there was some noise from the coffee machine - which can be heard on the digital recording - however the noise did not obscure the recording, nor was it necessary for the participant to repeat him or her self during the interview.

The research inquiry was concerned with exploring, from a spectrum of policy actors (Bowe *et al*., 1992; Braun *et al*., 2010), thoughts, experiences and beliefs regarding what governed and informed their teaching and management practice. It was important to try and understand participant's opportunities to contribute to policy initiatives that governed their everyday interactions with students, colleagues and management.

With this in mind, of the nine participants from the two colleges, two Principals, and one former Principal were interviewed, as well as one Vice Principal, and one Middle Manager, whom also had additional external responsibilities in an inspection capacity; two Middle Managers whom were also curriculum Line Managers - one of the Middle Managers had responsibility on matters relating to inclusion, the other had some responsibility for continuous professional development (CPD) of teachers. In addition, two teachers volunteered to take part in the research, both disclosed in their initial email that they are neuro-diverse, diagnosed with a specific learning

difference (SpLDs). One of the SpLD teachers also had some additional responsibility in a cross college role related to pastoral care.

The FE sector organisations, agencies and departments were solicited in the main via publically available contact details. However, both Participant M and Participant Q were approached through the snowball sample process of existing participants, they both granted permission for their personal details to be passed on to me. All participants were not selected as a spokesperson for any particular organisation and therefore it was not necessary to seek permission to approach them from their employer. The recruitment of the wider sector participants was somewhat more taxing and required a greater investment of time. In total twenty eight persons were contacted, with a final six agreeing to be interviewed; at least one informal telephone conversation took place. With three of the participants it was necessary to have more than one informal conversation about the nature of the research inquiry.

Unlike the interviews with participants from the two colleges, the scoping of the interviews for participants from FE organisations, agencies and departments had to take place much earlier in the research process. Three of the six participants were initially contacted a year and a half before the actual interviews were conducted. The reason for this is twofold: firstly, it was necessary for the purpose of scoping and planning the ethics application to ensure that essential detail was sufficiently covered for ethics to be granted. Secondly, as an experienced teacher and manager who had worked in the FE sector for eleven years, I felt I had the necessary 'cultural capital' (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990) to engage with the participants from the two FE colleges as I had some understanding of the site of inquiry. I was much less astute about how the FE sector agencies and organisations operated. It was necessary therefore to spend time researching FE sector organisations, starting with their 'About' pages, reading their guidance and policy documents to not only obtain a better understanding of the FE sector site of inquiry, but to purposively identify participants named in documents that may be suitable for interviewing.

During informal scoping conversations other organisations and names were put forward, again enabling me to benefit from the 'snowball' sample technique. Most of the participants were approached directly, there are however instances of snowball sampling, where participants were suggested or recommended by existing participants. Furthermore, due to the seniority of some of the persons contacted, it was necessary to reflect on how 'power relations' might manifest in the managing of the interview, something that has been considered in the literature on interviewing those that may be categorised as an 'elite' person (Harvey, 2010; Smith, 2006).

One of the participants referred to as Participant R, a former Policy Officer at the Department for Education (DfE) resulted fortuitously from informal conversations with the participant at a work event. All of the six interviewed bar one were interviewed at their place of work. Of the five interviewed at work only one was not interviewed in a private office. The participant known in the research as Participant M, FE & HE Consultant, was unable to secure a private location for the interview; the interview took place in a communal area of their workplace. However, for the duration of the interview the immediate surrounding space remained vacant, and so the interview was not compromised by the possibility of someone overhearing what was disclosed. Of the six interviews the research population includes: two current senior policy managers at two different membership organisations, one former senior policy manager at a membership organisation, one senior manager from a Union, one former policy officer from the DfE, one FE and HE consultant. The interviews were conducted from March 2018 through to December 2018.

In the following sub-heading the data analysis process is explained in detail. Including an account of the sixteen stage methodical process carried out in the organising, processing and grouping of the data. The techniques adopted by thematic analysists such as Braun and Clarke (2006), are shared and elaborated on in the sixteen stage process. Some reflections regarding managing such a large corpus of data as someone who is neurodiverse are included, and the techniques for overcoming particular obstacles due to the size of the data are shared.

## 4.5 Data analysis

The qualitative interviews comprised of 15 interview transcripts at an average of fourteen A4 pages long, with 1.5 spacing and font Calibri, text size 11. The corpus of data collected was substantial in detail. I thought it necessary as part of a 'rite of passage' from doctoral student to researcher to make the decision to transcribe the interview scripts myself, even as, I was acutely aware the process would take me an inordinate amount of time to transcribe the scripts due to my neurodiversity. My diagnosis of dyslexia and dyspraxia has implications for me with regard to retaining and processing information: I have specific phonological memory and verbal memory difficulties.

Therefore, to aid the organisation of the data, and to assist in the embryonic stage of the data analysis, the interview audio was uploaded to *Sonocent* audio notetaking software, which comprises of various formatting options, and enables content to be displayed in a way that appreciates a range of learning styles. I was able to categorise and group the interview audio through the process of using pre-set section colours; the colours and names of the sections were determined by the nine overarching headings which correlated to the key interview questions and objectives of the research inquiry (Appendix B). The display provided both visual and audio content, with the additional functionality of a text column, which enabled me to write a few key notes on how the audio related to the particular category heading.

The combination of the text and audio columns and the coloured categorisation provided a quick visual representation of which of the nine research headings participants referred to; using colours assisted in the memorising of each heading and helped to identify how important each heading was in terms of how often participants referred to it, and how much they talked about it. The nine research headings also formed the basis of the first iteration of the data coding, after which the interviews were transcribed in full and sent to each participant for comment. If a participant provided any comment or requested that parts not be directly quoted this was noted

in the body of the transcript.

The data analysis involved techniques popularised by methodological theorists such as Braun and Clarke (2006) who champion the methodological theory of thematic analysis in the process of data analysis. Thematic analysis is described by Braun and Clarke as 'a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within the data' (Braun & Clarke, 2006:79). There was never any intention to adopt a purist approach to thematic analysis, but the technique of familiarising myself with the data by reading and re-reading the data, and presenting the data in a number of forms aided in identifying emerging themes from the data. Nonetheless, I began the preliminary process of data analysis by familiarising myself with the data, a technique that is often adopted by researchers who favour a thematic analysis approach. In addition, I adopted an inductive approach and set aside as best I could any preconceived ideas I had of what I might find, my own feelings of performative discourse and the challenges it had presented me as a neurodiverse teacher. What aided me in the induction was the methodical process I followed throughout the process of data analysis; it encouraged me to return again and again to what the participant had said and to engage in what phenomenologists refer to as 'bracketing': to replace my thoughts with those of the participants, to understand 'the words and viewpoints of a participant *on their own terms* [author emphasis]' (Watts, 2013:3).

To begin, I read through the full transcript, then re-read and typed up discursive notes per page of the transcript on how the participant presented themselves in terms of what they were trying to get across and how they wanted to be perceived; in short I was 'trying to see the world through their eyes' (Watts, 2013:5). Watts (2013) stresses the need for the qualitative researcher to firstly try and 'establish the first-person perspective' by reading and re-reading the data; this is essential to the data analysis process if a researcher is to truly understand the participant's viewpoint. Watts goes as far as to recommend that coding of qualitative data should only begin once a researcher could 'stand effectively as that participant's proxy in an interview situation' - anything less requires further reading and re-reading of the data (Watts, 2013:5). After making the discursive notes, I followed the immersive process again and

attempted to draw out any further first person perspective observations in the data.

Once satisfied, I returned to the nine overarching headings noting numerically next to the applicable line of text which of the nine headings applied. At the end of each script a tally chart was created which included numerical totals for the frequency of occurrences of each heading. The process was repeated twice for each of the fifteen transcripts. The tally figures were then recorded in a spreadsheet entitled 'Synthesis 1st stage heading analysis V2' (Appendix C): under each of the nine overarching headings, per participant, occurrences of each heading was noted and a brief overview of what the participant said was also included in the spreadsheet, with the intention of creating a compact and concise recording of both quantitative and qualitative notes. From observing the occurrences I was able to see at a glance how often a particular heading occurred.

However, it was still too early to start the coding process; a further stage of discursive note taking had to occur first. I was mindful that the themes should emerge from what the participants had said, rather than from predetermined headings created by the researcher. I set about recording written hand notes in a notebook, affectionately referred to as the 'golden book' by one of my supervisors, due to the bright yellow gold colour of the cover. This time in the 'golden book' I proceeded to approach the data from the perspective of the third person - as an outsider looking in. Again I went through each page of the interview scripts and noted discursive points. From this process themes started to emerge from the data, each theme was noted and numbered, and the process was repeated twice per script. A list of eleven themes started to emerge: 1. Prescription – 'I have to' lack of freedom/control, 2.This is the way we do it here, 3. Performative technology/proof, 4. Homogeneity – cult of the performative teacher, 5. Informal process of consultation, 6. Selective consultation, 7. Accountability, 8. Resource limitation – time, personnel etc., 9. Improve or proof, 10. Context/environment, 11. Reasonable adjustments.

The notes from the 'golden book' were then typed up and added to the original 1st stage analysis discursive notes for each script. The discursive notes were reviewed and where

applicable the eleven themes were noted on the script by their associated numerical number. This process was repeated a further two times per script, however throughout each full transcript, following this stage a further two themes appeared, with one of the additional themes splintering into three sub-themes, 12. Trust, 13a. Agency = meso level, 13b. Agency = micro level, 13c. Agency = macro level. No further themes emerged and the thirteen themes became codes.

In appreciation of my neurodiversity, and the substantial task facing me in terms of processing and ordering the data into a coherent and detailed data analysis and discussion chapter(s), I decided to adopt a technique I often use to process large amounts of information: that of using large flip chart paper to create colour associated diagrams of a particular subject matter. For each of the thirteen codes I produced a flip chart paper diagram and noted down key points from each participant for each of the codes. In addition, in order to ensure the codes were independent of each other a process of placing them next to each other on the same flip chart paper provided the opportunity to see how distinct they were. To illustrate the process, code 3. Performative technology/proof and code 9. Improve or proof, were presented side by side with accompanying extracts from the interview scripts. Different colours for each code were used to aid the distinction: code 3 was noted in blue ink and code 9 in green ink.

The flip chart technique provided a holistic large visual grouping of the data that supported the existing codes identified. The technique enabled me to apply what Watts (2013) refers to as the "what/how" system, the former descriptive and the latter interpretative (Watts, 2013:6). From the visual diagram I could see what the participant was saying about a particular topic, and how they were constructing their understanding. In addition, as the paper was expansive, I was able to place several participants' views on a particular topic in close proximity with others, enabling me to identify more readily any emerging themes. The technique of creating the diagrams and the association of using colours in the ordering of the data enabled me to process the large corpus of data and to make sense of what was pertinent in the data, as well as to decide on the final iteration of the data codes. Each of the flip chart diagrams were then presented in bullet

point form in the ‘golden book’. The exercise provided an additional opportunity for me to process the data by presenting it in another form, as well as ensuring that I had a large somewhat aerial view of the coded data, and a compact record.

The final stage of the data analysis and discussion preparation involved a review of the thirteen codes referred to above. The comparison and distinction exercise using the flip chart paper aided in the grouping and ordering of the final codes. The thirteen codes were reduced to the following seven:

1. Agency/prescriptive/lack of agency – micro, meso, macro
2. Performative technology/Proof
3. ‘Cult of performative teacher’ – homogenous + support/adjustments/specific
4. Consultation process – formal/informal/influences
5. Accountability/Trust
6. Improve or prove
7. Context – micro, meso, macro.

Each of the codes were written up as distinct chapters.

The protracted time taken in presenting the data in different forms had successfully enabled me to recall efficiently and effectively relevant participant extracts. I displayed the relevant flip charts, consulted the ‘golden book’, referred to the full interview scripts, and the ‘Synthesis 1st stage heading analysis V2’ (Appendix C).

This holistic methodical approach set a solid foundation for what would have been an arduous task for any doctoral researcher, but for a neuodiverse researcher with recall and processing differences the data analysis of a large corpus of data was particularly overwhelming and intimidating. This is a cautionary point that should be considered by Graduate departments of

institutions where neurodiverse doctoral and postdoctoral researchers reside: to pay some attention to the possible additional steps that may be required for a neurodiverse researcher to organise, process, and present the data in preparation for write up. Shaywitz (2008) describes the possible recall and processing journey for someone with dyslexia as “circuitous and bumpy… you get where you’re going, but it takes a lot longer” (Shaywitz, 2008, cited in, Armstrong, 2010:30). For me the data analysis process was certainly ‘circuitous’, but nonetheless extremely valuable, with the additional advantage of tailoring recognised thematic analysis techniques of data familiarity with my own crafted process techniques.

Once the seven data analysis and discussion themes were drafted, one final review of the ordering of the chapters took place. The chapters were grouped into three themes of agency and circumstances, accountability and trust, and the cult of the performative teacher.

The logic in the ordering of the chapters into the three themes was first to better situate the data within historical accounts of policy, the policy cycle process, and the prevailing performative discourse that continues to permeate the English FE sector. Second, the structure of the literature review chapters provides a path for the reader towards the findings implicitly referred to throughout the data analysis and discussion chapters (Chapters 5-7), and explicitly presented in the conclusion (Chapter 8).

The data extracts selected for presentation in this thesis were arrived at following the coding process outlined above. The process of identifying extracts according to Watts (2013) is little different to the process of extract selection during the literature review process. Albeit Watts (2013) points to the irony that accusations of subjectivity and randomness are often only reserved for the data extract process, and not the literature review. The data extract approach in this thesis is not concerned with quantitative approaches of providing a representative sample of extracts, instead, the primary concern was to provide a purposive sample of extracts, one that best illustrated the emergent themes outlined above.

The final sub-heading in this chapter will present and ruminate over the ethical considerations of this research. Attention is paid to many of the ethical guidelines documented by both the BSA (2017) and BERA (2018). Consent of participants is stressed and the process of gaining consent is explained. Furthermore, some attention is paid to the 'ethical sensitivities' of the participants who disclosed their SpLD status. In concluding, the Chapter also provides detail on how the data will be stored, referring to guidance from the UK Data service (2019).

## 4.6. Ethical considerations

The research population included mature adult professionals working in the FE sector. The majority of participants held managerial and leadership positions. The participant sample did not specifically seek to include any individuals classified as socially vulnerable, or with medical issues. However, two of the participants, Participant K, and Participant I, disclosed their dyslexia during the participant recruitment process and again at the beginning of the interview. Albeit, the aim of the research was not to focus on narrative experiences of individuals with neurodiverse conditions such as dyslexia, questions were asked about diagnosis, and experiences were shared on the practice of being a teaching professional with dyslexia.

In the design of the interview schedule, questions were in the main situated around the policy process and were not thought in any way to be controversial or sensitive. As the researcher I believe I adhered to the necessary 'duty of care' considerations recommended by the British Education Research Association (BERA) in the design of the research, and the execution (BERA, 2018:19). However, there is a possibility that in the recounting of their experiences of diagnoses it may have evoked feelings that were uncomfortable for them. One in particular reflected on the doubts they had of being considered a competent teacher due to their dyslexia.

> *That was another thing that made me wobble about being a [names subject] teacher, my inability to hold on to any sort of detail at all, as at times it made*

*me really think about leaving teaching* (Participant I).

Notwithstanding, I would argue that as both participants were aware of my status as a neurodiverse teacher with dyslexia and dyspraxia, the shared commonality provided an empathetic and authentic interview environment. That is not to say I believed our collective experience to be the same, but in sharing my own experiences during the interview in the form of 'interactive interviewing' (Kiesinger & Healy, 1997, cited in Finlay, 2002:539), the act of sharing created a dynamic, safe, and encouraging environment for both Participant I and K to express thoughtful and reflective comments.

In addition, Brinkmann and Kvale (2011) raise a note of caution in the dynamic created by qualitative interviews. They note that the open and intimate nature of qualitative interviews could be 'seductive' and encourage the participant to 'disclose information they may later regret' (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2011:8). The notion of a 'seductive' interview environment may explain why three of the participants interviewed, on reading their transcript, requested for parts of the script not to be directly quoted. They expressed some concern that they had been too forceful in their language, and/or disclosed what they perceived to be confidential information. The matter was resolved by agreeing to the request to not directly quote, in its place a compromise was agreed to use the sentiment expressed in the eventuality that other participants expressed similar sentiments.

It is important to note and reflect on the moral dynamic of both the interviewer and the interviewee; although the interviewer is there in a research capacity to extract insights into a particular phenomenon, the interviewee may find himself or herself using the opportunity to 'offload'. Brinkmann and Kvale argue the consequence of an attentive interviewer, in particular the interviewer's ability to listen well, could lead to a 'quasi-therapeutic relationship'. Albeit the research inquiry of this thesis did not concern itself with sensitive or controversial subject matter, there is still some appreciation of the 'ethical sensitivity' of participants declaring they may have said too much (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2011:8). Ethical sensitivity was addressed in the consent of the agreed compromise outlined above.

The two FE college principals (participants O & N) are known to me in my professional capacity as a manager and teacher in the FE sector. Of note, one of the Principals retired before the empirical research started and introductions and consent were obtained from their successor. The Principals were initially approached to seek permission for staff to be solicited via all staff meetings and through college email communications with the intention of recruiting volunteers to take part in the research (Appendix D). The consent from the authority, in this instance the Principal, is in keeping with BERA's recommendation point 11., that the institution of the site of inquiry 'ought to be considered in the process of gaining consent' (BERA, 2018:10). In addition, it was deemed necessary to inform the appropriate authority of the scope of the research for reasons relating to safeguarding, as it was likely that interested persons may request to be interviewed on college premises within teaching hours. Albeit, students were not included in the research inquiry, it was incumbent on me as the researcher to ensure safeguarding protocols and practices were adhered to while I was on site (BERA, 2018:10). A consent form was signed by the Principal on behalf of the institution to permit the research inquiry to take place on site (Appendix E). In addition, each person that came forth to take part in the research as a participant signed an individual consent form (Appendix F).

All interested persons were offered an informal conversation via the phone or in person to address any questions they might have before the interview, none of the participants from the two colleges requested an initial conversation. Israel (2015) states that informed consent from participants includes two considerations: first, that the participant 'comprehends' the 'nature' of the research and 'their role within' the research, and secondly that they 'voluntarily' consent (Israel, 2015:79). In order to ensure that due care and attention was paid to the two considerations outlined by Israel (2015) all participants were provided in advance of the interview with a template of the consent form, which included a brief synopsis of the intent of the research inquiry, an overview of how the data will be gathered, and in what form the research findings will be published. Notwithstanding, the British Sociological Association (BSA) statement of ethical practice encourages its members and other social science researchers to recognise

the need to acknowledge that at times it may be difficult to 'discharge' the responsibility of disseminating data in situations where there might be 'competing social interests' (BSA, 2017:8). Therefore, for transparency it is important to all participants that their 'rights' were made clear from the very start of the research and that all efforts were taken to ensure that the participant, nor the institution they work in, were compromised by the data collection, reporting and publishing. In addition, all participants were given the 'right to withdraw' at any time throughout the data collection, transcription of recordings and pre-published stages (BERA, 2018:18).

All participants were provided with a template of the consent form prior to the interview which included a brief synopsis of what the research is about. The intention is to prepare the interviewee for the interview and prevent any unwanted surprises regarding the context of the research inquiry. Participants were advised at the beginning of each interview their right to choose not to answer a particular question; they were also advised they could stop the interview at any point (BERA, 2018). At the end of the interview participants were debriefed and provided with a debrief letter which reiterated the purpose of the research, useful contact details and thanked them for participating in the research. All participants were reminded of the intent to use the data in fulfilment of a PhD in Education, and the possibility that the data could feature in academic articles and in conference papers. The consent form provided a brief overview of how the data may be used. Participants were also invited to ask any questions about the research inquiry, including the design and dissemination. Brinkmann and Kvale (2011:7) recommend the practice of 'full information about the design and purpose', transparency is important to avoid deception.

In regards to my own personal due diligence as a doctoral research student, I adhered to the lone working policy of the University and ensured that my schedule and whereabouts as an interviewer was known and that any changes to that schedule were reported. Furthermore, a University risk assessment form was completed, approved, and submitted as part of the University ethics application. Supervisors and a nominated family member were provided with a

list of the date, times, and location of all interviews and a contact number should they need to contact me. No personal identifying details of the participants were provided to the family member. In addition, I had the contact number of one of the supervisors in case of an emergency.

Matters concerning anonymity and confidentiality were discussed with each participant during a pre-research briefing discussion. Full transparency was exercised: participants were informed of exactly what would happen to their data, how the data would be transcribed and reported, and finally whether the participant would be identifiable from the data presented (Wiles, 2013). As more than one interview took place within the same organisation, it was necessary to ensure that during the process of data collection no accidental disclosure took place. It was made clear to all participants, including the gatekeepers to participants (in particular the Principals), that the interview data of other participants within the same organisation, or external organisations would not be disclosed (BERA, 2018). Furthermore, in order to gain access to the participants from the two FE colleges it was necessary to seek permission from the current Principals. During the initial informal discussions with the Principals, they both suggested employees that could be relevant to the research topic. It was made clear to both Principals that the identification of those that agree to take part in the interviews would not be shared with them, nor will the data from the individual interview transcripts (Wiles, 2013).

On more than one occasion, a participant who had recommended someone that might be of interest to the research asked whether the named person had been interviewed; a polite reminder that such matters could not be disclosed was delivered and received with understanding and acceptance. Participants were not offered the option to waiver their rights to anonymity as the intention of the research is not to identify publicly the key policy actors, but to get an insight into the thoughts and opinions relating to the research inquiry from policy actors working within the English FE sector.

Once a participant had agreed to be interviewed, they were assigned a pseudonym in the form of an alphabetical letter; they were also assigned a numerical identifier code that appeared on the top of their consent form and debrief form. The latter was used in all correspondence with the participant, and they were advised should they wish to opt out of the research they should state their identifier code in the body of the written correspondence. Participants were not permitted to choose their own pseudonyms, as according to Wiles (2013) they often select the name of someone they know, such as a family member, friend, or even a work colleague (Wiles, 2013). In the data analysis and discussion chapters (Chapters 5-7) for the purpose of anonymity the personal pronoun of 'they' is used when referring to the participant.

Raw data, including transcribed interviews and field notes taken during the collection of empirical data, was stored on two devices: the hard drive of a personal computer, and on an external storage drive. Both devices belong to the researcher, and are for personal use only, no one else had access to the devices. The personal computer and hard drive are encrypted with a password, and the personal computer has an extra security setting which includes a fingerprint identification process. As stated by UK Data Service, it is important to not only ensure that raw data is secure, it is also important to make sure that said data is accessible (UK Data Service, 2019). The UK Data Service state that optical media is often subject to becoming dated over time, in addition they state that magnetic media like hard drives are 'subject to physical degradation', therefore they recommend that data is transferred to a new form every two to five years. As information technology is constantly evolving it is important to ensure that the raw data is saved on more than one device and in more than one way, otherwise there is a risk of losing the data if it is saved on a device that has become obsolete (UK Data Service, 2019).

To aid the security of the transcripts and accompanying forms (consent, debrief) all files have been encrypted with a password. When the interview transcripts were shared with participants they were shared as a pdf file, participants were invited to add any comments, amendments, and/or additions on a separate review document. As stated interviews were digitally recorded: once the interview audio file was uploaded to the two devices mentioned above, the original

audio file was deleted from the digital recorder. The digital file was placed in an encrypted password protected folder. Regarding physical security, any hard copies of interview transcripts and personal/confidential documents are stored in a private filing cabinet. In accordance with the University's code of good practice the raw data will be kept for a minimum of ten years.

As per the *Data Projection Act 2018*, only personal data necessary to carry out the research will be recorded, such as name, occupation, and place of employment. Furthermore, in order to protect the identity of participants, pseudonyms were assigned to each participant and only the pseudonym is noted on the appropriate transcript: no other personal details of the participant appears on the interview script. It is important to note that for the purposes of GDPR, where an identifier is replaced by a pseudonym it is still considered to be personal data (Information Commissioner's Office, 2019). However, the noting of the personal data referred to above was essential to the research inquiry in terms of understanding whether the role of the participant, or where they worked, had any implications for them as a key policy actor. In addition, a separate electronic list matching the pseudonym to the participant exists for the researcher's purposes only; the list is encrypted with a password (BERA, 2018).

## 4.7 Summary

This chapter has provided a detailed and comprehensive account of the research methodology and process, from inception to the analysis of the data. It has also documented the methodical process executed to ensure the data themes presented in the following three data analysis and discussion chapters (Chapters 5-7) have authenticity and trustworthiness in line with the methodological approach.

The next chapter (Chapter 5), introduces the key ideas borne out of the data around agency and context. A brief recap of the literature on the FE sector is shared with the purpose of introducing the policy actors of this research and their thoughts on the current FE climate. Levels of agency are defined by using micro, meso, and macro definitions, and the use of the

terms are contextualised by stating how they are operationalised and used within the research inquiry. Micro and meso levels of agency are explored within both the context of the FE college and FE sector organisations agencies and departments, with the purpose of identifying whether expressions of agency are fixed depending on someone's role, or where they feature in the policy cycle process.

# Chapter 5: Agency and Circumstances

## 5.1 Introduction

The FE sector in England is documented in the current literature as a sector blighted by historical and present day inconsistencies, and disjointed policies and practices (see Bailey & Unwin, 2014; Fisher, 2010; Gleeson & Shain, 1999; Lucas & Crowther, 2016; Simkins & Lumby, 2002; Simmons, 2008; Simmons & Thompson, 2008). A central tenet of the literature is the ever changing context that teachers, managers and students find themselves navigating within. Much of the literature points to the introduction of the F & H Act 1992, as a watershed moment in terms of shifting the context of the culture in FE sector from a sector concerned with social-democratic principles, to one dominated by neo-liberal principles. The accounts of the participants in this research sustain the position of a sector without a clear identity. In addition, the participants describe a sector that is struggling to withstand the post incorporation culture with its uncertainty, instability, and contextual nuances.

The aim of this research is to explore the contribution of policy techniques, policy processes and performativity in the construction of teachers with SpLDs as subjects in the English FE sector. Therefore, it was necessary to uncover whether the context of observing a lesson of a teacher who declared their SpLD altered the protocol before and/or after the observation had taken place. With this in mind, initially the intention was to gather data around the context of the micro teaching and learning experience of individual teachers, and managers tasked with observing them. However, what emerged as the interviews progressed was an appreciation that the context could not be restricted to isolated instances of lesson observation practice. Instead, a rich and holistic theme stared to emerge in relation to context. Participants not only referred to contextual experiences at the micro level in terms of their everyday teaching and managing experiences; what emerged, in particular from participants who had senior management responsibility, was an appreciation of both the meso and macro contextual levels.

The meso contextual matter revealed itself in the form of participants recognising the FE workforce as a heterogeneous one. Participants argued notions of teaching and learning depended on the context of a department, in particular differences were raised between vocational and academic subjects. The context of whether a college was either an 'inclusive' or 'exclusive' institution in terms of its entry requirements also implied differences at the meso level. In addition, participants identified how macro level political discourse presented contextual challenges for individual institutions and the FE sector as a whole.

To aid the reader, as in Thorpe and Burns (2016) exploration of work based diversity, this Chapter explores, by defining the individual as the micro level, organisational level as meso, and the wider discourse(s) as macro (Thorpe & Burns, 2016: 206). The account is split into several sub-headings; the first will concern itself with the micro level of context in terms of individual teacher and manager experiences of lesson observations. In addition, the wider meso level will explore how college's and FE sector organisations navigate around and through the contextual changes brought about by government policy. Furthermore, attention is paid to the implications on the sector of a 'revolving door' of education ministers. Explorations of the macro level will be presented; particular attention is paid to the context and how policy techniques and processes operate and govern education policy and practice in the FE sector.

The next sub-heading will begin a detailed account of the data analysis in relation to the micro and meso levels of agency exercised within the context of the FE sector. In order to understand the nuances associated with the participants' accounts of their micro agency, specific policy techniques like the lesson observation are used to draw out the participant's (see Table 1.) reality of their engagement and enactment of policy. Of note, in this chapter and the subsequent chapters 6-7 the personal pronoun of 'they' is used to uphold the anonymity of the participants.

## 5.2 Micro and meso levels of context in the FE sector

Participants were asked about the lesson observation policy to draw out perceived benefits of lesson observation policy, and to identify performative techniques. Both colleges included in the sample population stated they no longer graded individual lesson observations. Notwithstanding, teachers were still expected to be good or better. Participants were asked through the use of a series of probe questions whether any factors apart from the set lesson observation policy were considered during lesson observation practice. Probe questions were used to identify factors that enabled an exploration of a participant's interpretation of the part they played in the enactment of lesson observation policy. This was in order to ascertain some insight into a participant's perception of how and when they exercise agency in the enactment of performative lesson observation policy.

One of the teacher and tutor participants (Participant I) in their opening line describes the lesson observation record as a generic non-adapted form. They go on to assert they are expected to include numeracy – if appropriate. What is being described is a process in which micro agency at the individual level does not appear to be asserted. Instead, the policy technique of the lesson observation policy process appears to be followed to the letter. However, where micro agency appears to be exercised is in the challenge to the observer over the matter of 'British values'. The closing statement 'we' do not change but follow college policy is an interesting one, as it positions them as part of a collective with limited agency. It is not clear who 'we' are, but the interpretation of their agency is unlikely in this example, otherwise they would describe themselves as a key policy actor in the enactment of lesson observation policy (Braun *et al.*, 2010).

> *There is a College sheet you fill out, they are not adapted for* [names subject] *in anyway, even with numeracy we have to meet numeracy in our lessons, if it is appropriate. In my recent observation she said you didn't address British values and I said there was nothing to address in that lesson so don't pull me up on that. There have been other times on an EQR where I*

*have addressed British values because it was relevant. We don't change we follow the College policy* (Participant I).

Alternatively, a line and middle manager from the same College presented a more fluid interpretation of the lesson observation policy process: one in which they exercised some micro agency and considered the type of qualification context, and how that may influence teaching techniques. Of note however, in both participants' accounts is the dominance of government duties, such as Prevent and British Values, which are presented as a mental performative tick-box of things to include.

*I will be looking at assessment for learning, so how far the students are evidencing how they are learning something... Questioning techniques is quite a big buzzy thing that we have to kind of look at, which again varies from department to department because of the nature of the questions. If you do BETC and you are doing one to one feedback it is slightly different to whole class questioning. I would look at the nature of that. Are all the students on task, the use of ICT to aid learning, levels of independence of learning amongst the students, differentiation of students of course, what else is there. Equality and diversity, Prevent and British values* (Participant B).

After they were probed further on whether they exercised any further agency while observing, they stated the following:

*Urrrmm… no not usually, I just go by the criteria on the sheet. Occasionally I might think about it is period 6 on a Friday, the room is boiling hot, I will be a little bit, yeah okay. Otherwise probably I just take each one on what I see there and then as a snapshot… in that role... No otherwise it is just very much there and then with the sheet with the criteria on it. One of my colleagues is an NQT, so I am a bit okay they are learning, so I will be a bit more… I wouldn't be… not that different, but I think I might be… might pick on slightly different things for them to work on...* (Participant B).

Further examples of micro agency are shared by another middle manager (who is also an external inspector) in their appreciation of the contextual factors that may influence lesson observation practice. However, they do acknowledge the fixed policy technologies at play in their reference to Ofsted and the positioning of perceived 'objective' measures of performance.

> *… Now in terms of improvement I don't like the scrabbling around trying to find something to say, either the lesson is good, you still have to take things into account, for instance if you are teaching period 6 on a Friday, compared to if you are teaching period 3 on a Wednesday, you have to think has the teacher thought about the most appropriate thing to do with that group at that time. Sometimes there is no choice and you have to tackle something difficult at the time, you have to take some of the context into account – Ofsted would probably say no you don't, you have to judge everything on a level playing field…* (Participant H).

The policy technique of Ofsted measurements are challenged further by one of the principal participants, in their recounting of a conference discussion with Ofsted representatives on the role of Ofsted:

> *I went to Frank Coffield's 'Can a leopard change its spots' and I've read the book. And we did have representatives from Ofsted at the conference and of course their line is you know, our fundamental role is to ensure the quality of the educational experience nationally in whatever form that takes, and therefore it can't be contextualise. Because one of Frank's arguments is, institutions are very different* (Participant O).

In the accounts by the participants noted above, variant degrees of agency are shared in the recollection of the enactment of lesson observation policy. However, the spectre of Ofsted lesson observation policy framework and government duties (Prevent) is evident in the responses. The policy technologies at play are presented as omnipresent in both an explicit and implicit way. Implicitly in the recounting of the performative check list by the middle manager (Participant B), and explicitly in the 'one size fits' all account of Ofsted discourse presented by both the Principal and the middle manager (Participant H), the contribution of

policy technologies referred to appear to be in the setting of formulaic indicators for the FE sector to adhere to, and to be measured by.

In the next sub-heading, the context in which the policy techniques of measurement reside are further explored. In particular, the technique of comparisons between teacher's results and the results of institutions will be critiqued and situated within the inconsistent environ of the FE sector.

## 5.3 The 'inclusive' and 'exclusive' context of FE colleges

Teachers operate for the most part in a closed environment with each of their individual teaching groups. Paradoxically, the technique of comparing individual teachers within a department, across a college, and within the sector as a whole is common place. Of concern is the act of comparison that assumes that the comparative indicators are equal, when in fact the situation is much more complex. In the literature the FE sector is described as incoherent and uncoordinated, with no clear remit (Bailey & Unwin, 2014; Green, 2013). General further education colleges (GFEC) are compared with sixth form colleges (SFC), and sixth form centres in schools. The participants in this research illustrate further sector inconsistencies in their description of two further sub-categories, referred to as 'inclusive' and 'exclusive' institutions. One of the participants who holds a senior policy manager role at a large membership organisation discusses the complexities associated with the technique of comparing accountability measures between different types of FE organisation.

> *If you are selective institution you are always going to do better on the accountably aren't you because you can select students in or out of the system knowing that they are going to affect your performance or accountability measures or not. Whether you have an inclusive or exclusive approach to recruitment has a big difference on your ability to perform in the eyes of the accountability measures, so it's about whether you have an elitist~~s~~ or inclusive approach* (Participant E).

The complexities noted are also echoed in the response from one of the principals:

> *I think the problem for me about that is there is a difference about meeting standards in a data sense and meeting standards in a real sense, we could in theory anyway become an exam factory, we could learn how to play the A Level system for example and we could become very selective and we could hothouse the students that we have, we could train them to pass exams… on paper we will have absolutely met those standards. If you think about the performance measures in terms of attainment, in terms of progression, we would have ticked all of those boxes, but we wouldn't have provided those young people with a good education* (Participant O).

The take away point being that the policy technology of comparing different types of FE institution is flawed, as it does not consider the context in which the performance of teaching and learning takes place. However, such a reading of the policy technology of comparison may be missing the purpose of the technique altogether. The government, and agencies such as Ofsted, are likely to be aware that the measurement playing field is not level. However, as the principal referred to above, Ofsted's role is to have a national process - therefore, contextual considerations would deviate from the purpose of the technology.

In addition, the points raised by the participants are not unique to their own experience or institutions. In 2005 Whitehead argued that if colleges were failing it was time that the government and agencies such as Ofsted approach the matter in a more considered way, instead of blaming the workforce for the supposed failure (Whitehead, 2005). In addition, O'Leary (2013) argued the language of 'quality' and 'standards' were in accordance with what O'Leary referred to as the 'wider FE reform agenda' to strive for greater performance and improvement. The failure on the part of the government and Ofsted, as the principal above noted, to show any appreciation between meeting 'standards in a data sense and meeting standards in a real sense' will undoubtedly result in some colleges falling foul of the government's accountability measures, should they 'choose' to exercise the organisations meso agency by adopting an 'inclusive' philosophy in the recruitment of students. However, the policy

technology of comparison is a technique that epitomises the performative discourse of the post-incorporated sector. Since incorporation, the adoption of New Public Management (NPM) principles, encouraging efficiency, and effectiveness through aggressive marketing and competition strategies, has contributed to a sector concerned with standardised measurements and technologies of compliance.

In addition, and in reference to the literature, the context of an institution in terms of type of institution had a considerable bearing on how the institution managed the implications of incorporation. Briggs (2004) concluded that the SFC on the whole managed the process better, as unlike GFEC, SFC had a stable focus on the teaching and learning needs of 16-19 full time students. In addition, Lumby (2003:167) portrayed a more nuanced argument by distinguishing between 'schooly' and 'collegey' SFC's and recognised the student bodies within the two types of SFC were not the same, and were impacted further by geographical location. The senior policy manger developed on the points made earlier and describes the contextual consequences of student achievement rates in deprived areas:

> *… if you are in a very deprived area and your cohort have a low level attainment, say the school system has failed them, should you expect high levels of performance out of those students, or not… and does having a performance system in place help people contextualise and work out where their starting points are* (Participant E).

However, some participants were more inclined to raise points of contention situated around the ever changing context of the FE sector. The FE & HE consultant raised an interesting point about the lack of an identifiable remit or purpose of the FE sector:

> *Part of the issue is FE is not defined by what it is, it is defined but what it isn't, it is defined by the fact that it is not a school and it is defined by the fact that it is not a university and you only really understand what FE is, is by defining it against what it is not. So people understand universities and they understand schools, but they don't really understand FE, they probably understood it more in the 1950s when it was known as the tech, the*

> *technical college, but even then it was more clearly associated with those that didn't succeed academically engaged with vocational education and training* (Participant M).

The point raised is echoed in the research by Fisher (2010) who argues the FE sector has lost its' way. Fisher claims the GFEC had a clearer purpose in the 1950s and 1960s as the 'tech', and was revered as a 'solid civic institution' providing opportunities for social mobility and social cohesion (Fisher, 2010:120). Furthermore, the consultant points to the tensions created following incorporation, and the implications of these at the micro and meso levels of FE institutions and the sector as a whole.

> *… there is also a significant regulation since incorporation around there ability to control and have satisfactory finances, so you have got to work with those finances. But at the end of the day though, although they have been incorporated they have to build relations with local authorities… I mean FE really should be developing meaningful relationships with schools in order to get progression from schools into FE. Schools notoriously don't give access to FE and they want to hold onto those students themselves, especially the ones that have sixth forms. So there is a whole range of kind of partnership issues, regulatory issues, standing in communities that FE colleges are dealing with as well as trying to develop meaningful cultures and ways of working with staff in order to meet the requirements* (Participant M).

The tension between competition and collaboration is noted by Briggs (2004) in research comparing GFEC, SFC and schools. Albeit, Briggs found evidence of collaboration between SFC in the formation of SFC syndicate groups, the competitive context created by education policy, such as the FE & HE Act 1992, resulted in behaviours referred to in the literature as 'macho managerialism' where head teachers actively blocked pupils from attending SFC competitors (Smith, 2015).

In addition, participants cited that the ever changing context of the FE sector prevented it from establishing a distinct and stable purpose. One of the senior policy managers raised some

concerns regarding policy reform in England, stating the constant churn of policy prevented the sector from really understanding and benefitting from the reform changes implemented. Of interest is the implication that England has an unfair system and less than equal society. Although they did not elaborate on the point made, it is a curious claim for someone who holds an active role in working directly with the DfE and lobbying on behalf of the FE sector. It could be interpreted that the constant churn of policy, is in-itself a policy technic under panoptic performativity. Under the principles of panoptic performativity and the shifting frameworks of inspection the changes in educational reform, with the introduction of the T Levels, the reintroduction of the Linear A Level, and curriculum changes introduced by OFQUAL, have created a sector that regulates and governs its own performance. The constant changes, instead of being challenged, are assimilated into the sector as 'normalised behaviour' as teachers and managers adopt resilient strategies in order to perform to the new regime (Perryman *et al*., 2018).

> *… if you read what is said in the T Level consultation, in the original skills plan documentation is that they wanted the reform to last more than a parliament and so I think they have to be more open minded, while we don't want policy to be tinkered with constantly do we, they never leave policy changes long enough to actually be able to see the benefit. So the reforms we are going towards are systems that are Finland and Norway and Sweden and those systems have much fairer much more equal societies and they don't tinker or have major reforms all the time* (Participant E).

In addition, the former senior policy manager referred to the churn of education ministers over a five year period, as being particular obstructive in terms of the sector reflecting on whether policy reform provided any benefit for those it supposedly was intended for, the students.

> *I think it is an endemic part of the way this country drives change and policy so if I think about my five years in the FE sector I think we had six ministers, you know who all want different things, who have all got their own political interest and political gains of what they want to seek out and I think that when you have that constant churn of change all colleges and lecturers are*

*doing is just focusing on doing what they need to do to meet a new requirement and actually when your focus is on that, you focus is not on the experience and learning of the student…* (Participant G).

Participants from the two colleges also call attention to the contextual implications of the regularity in which education ministers have changed in the past five years.

*There is such detachment from policy making at a national level, and it being realised on the ground, and the other frustration with the model that we have got, is you can have a secretary of state for education who introduces all sorts of things good or bad by the time they are implemented they have left office, and that has obviously happened with the linear A Levels and Gove, we are living with the consequences of really one person's vision* (Participant O, Principal).

A middle manager stresses constant change in the syllabus, and states that education reform creates an unstable environment, one which is difficult for teachers to manage and navigate through:

*I think there is constant change, you get the hang of the syllabus and what exam boards want and then it changes. We know that Michael Gove more or less admitted that his reforms were about shaking everything up and make teachers suffer, he more or less said that, he said you cannot allow complacency – Maoist idea, you have to have constant revolution and because you get new education ministers, we have just had Damian Hinds take over, Justin Greening* (Participant H).

In addition, in turning to the FE & HE consultant's description of the changing face of government QANGOs, it could be argued that the unsound context of the FE sector continues with the remodelling of national organisations put in place to regulate the FE sector.

*So… most of my work has been to national organisations, so when the assisted government offices, lots of work with what were, don't know if you*

*know these FEEDER, further education and development agency which then became LSN, learning skills network, which then became LSDA, the learning skills development agency, which then morphed into LSIS, learning skills improvement service, nowadays the closest thing is the Education and Training Foundation, so they're basically government QANGO bodies* (Participant M).

What has been presented so far are some of the contextual tensions and frustrations experienced at both the micro and meso level. In the main, the frustrations have been expressed at the implementation of policy and policy reform from external agencies, such as Ofsted and the DfE. In turning now to the macro influences of dominant discourse, it is possible to situate the tensions and frustrations into the wider political context in which the FE sector operates.

## 5.4 The FE sector and the political context in which it resides

The corpus of literature on the shift in political discourse from a stance where policy and policy reform is entrenched in social-democratic principles, to one which holds true the logic of neo-liberal principles is echoed in the responses from participants. Lucas and Crowther (2016) and Hall and O'Shea (2013) helpfully explain the central tenet of neo-liberal discourse. The emphasis of neo-liberal policy is on removing dependency on the state in favour of promoting an unregulated market, where 'individual responsibility and competition' are the key drivers (Hall & O'Shea). From the late 1980s to the early 1990s it is argued in the literature that a new era of management emerged, referred to as New Public Management (NPM). NPM instilled neo-liberal ideals as the dominant discourse in which the FE sector would operate (See: Metcalf & Richards, 1987, cited in Randle & Brady 1997; Pollitt, 1990 cited in Randle & Brady, 1997). FE colleges from the 1990s onwards were encouraged to actively compete with each other; the theory was based on neo-liberal logic that competition would improve choice and experience for students (Gleeson & Shain 1999; Lucas & Crowther 2016).

However, the accounts of the participants in this research further challenge neo-liberal discourse assumptions. The FE & HE consultant states that instead of competition encouraging colleges to look outwards and consider the young people in their locality, it had the reverse effect, resulting in colleges becoming more insular and reductionist in their monetary focus on students as 'cash'.

> *The other big change that incorporation introduced was a massive generation of competition a highly competitive environment, where colleges began to look inwards and looked on themselves and competed to get themselves higher up the table, what I think we have lost was a lot of the partnership... We lost that and created this market for learners and learners came along with a figure a lump of dosh rather than a local authority having a enough places within its locality to meet the needs and education of its learners within its locality. They became cash, they became dosh* (Participant M).

Furthermore, a former policy officer from the DfE stated that principals turned inwards to cope with the pressures and tensions of government policy. In particular, they stated principals found it difficult to navigate through the context of 'perverse pressures' brought on by education policy borne out of accountability discourse.

> … *when you talk to a principal they see things just from the perspective of their school and then they see all of the external pressures that are outside, so quite a lot of the time they would be saying things like, these policies that you have implemented, you being the department… But this is what is stopping us from doing this, this is why we don't have enough teachers with the expertise because this is the way schools are held accountable it puts all these kind of perverse pressures on us and therefore to run my school effectively what I have to do, therefore these are the obstacles that I have to deal with* (Participant R).

In addition, the pressure by successive governments in favouring schools, and now SFC's, who change their status to an academy, has created a working context in which teachers do not relate to each other as teaching professionals; the common trend is now determined by which academy chain a teacher is affiliated to. The FE & HE consultant stated:

> *… one thing that we have lost and what some incorporation has done probably reinforced by acadimisation of schools, I think we have lost a notion of profession in a way in which we identify as all belonging to the same profession… The diminishing of the role of the local authority with incorporation... local authorities at least they looked after their communities, had a focus on the community and what happens to an extent… So there are aspects of consistency that have gone* (Participant M).

Furthermore, a senior policy manger brought to attention the perverse pressures from the government in office in creating a context in which SFC had little choice but to covert to academy status.

> *… we did say to the government you really need to treat sixth form colleges and sixth form academies as one in all of the things that you do. But for a variety of reasons they didn't… I guess what the government would say, well hang on as a group of colleges you had the chance to become academies and in becoming an academy we will give your VAT, you will now get a pay rise, you will now get all of this stuff but you chose not to do that… And we said to our [type of organisation] look we are completely neutral on this issue but I remember saying to the [type of organisation] quite early on if you want to be not quite in the circle of trust… but if you want to be on the side of the fence that does not get trampled on, it is that side of the fence, don't just look at the benefits now, look at what will happen in the future...* (Participant Q, Senior Policy Manager).

The policy technique of granting pay rises and VAT exemption is presented as a benefit for FE sixth form colleges who 'choose' to change status to an academy and comply to government reform. What is curious is the senior policy manager (Participant Q) did not open with a

balanced position on what the purpose and benefits might be for the educational character of a college, but on the micro benefits to staff in terms of pay and the meso benefits to the organisation in terms of the VAT status of the institution. The decision of colleges to exercise their meso agency - which should be their right to do so as an incorporated institution - is presented in a dichotic way: those who comply will be rewarded by the government, and those who 'choose' to assert their meso agency will be positioned as non-compliant subjects.

The academy status policy reform is not something that is raised by participants from either of the two FE colleges presented in this research. Instead, they share along with other participants their frustrations with policy reform around funding, and in particular budget cuts to the FE sector. The vice principal expresses concern at the continued budget cuts to the FE sector, and the precarious situation they find themselves in while managing the cuts. The lack of progressive funding in itself could be described as a policy technique, one that operationalises neo-liberal policy concepts of 'efficiency and effectiveness' (Pollitt, 1990, cited in Randle & Brady, 1997:125).

> *... next year is the first year where the lack of funding has really bitten us, we have been looking at ways to save money this year. So next year's budgets are a lot of tighter, looking at ways of not replacing people who are going. Jigging the curriculum around, seeing if we can defend our core offer, make sure what we are doing… we don't want to cut hours in the classroom, we don't want to cut the quality of teaching and learning, we are not going to cut the training or anything like that, but just see if there is anything else on the margins where we can save a few pennies, because… I am sure you know, we haven't had a funding increase in three years…* (Participant P).

Furthermore, current literature depicts a worry statistic in terms of funding and alerts of a real funding crisis in the FE sector (House of Commons, 2019). It was predicted in 2016 by Dennis, in reference to Keep (2014), that by 2018 the FE sector would experience a budget loss of 43 per cent (Keep, 2014, cited in Dennis, 2016).

In support, the former senior policy manager cites the current funding formula as being detrimental to the FE sector thriving. Albeit they begin with associating the advent of incorporation with the opportunity to consider the heterogeneous nature of the locality of students, they acknowledge the contradictory nature of FE funding prohibits the real possibilities of incorporation. This is a positon that is supported in the literature: Lucas and Crowther (2016) argue there is no 'free market' in FE education; colleges cannot determine their own price as sector funding is controlled by the government, restricting the meso agency of FE colleges over their finances.

> *I think that is the benefit of moving after incorporation as it actually stopped the focus on everybody being an homogenised lump saying actually lets focus on being great in particular areas and specialism. I think the funding means that has not been conducive to that but actually if our funding was based on contributions back into the economy for example or working more effectively with business in terms of workforce pipelining and that was where the funding was colleges would skyrocket. But instead they keep with safe subjects that they know they are going to get a good enrolment on and that they know they are going to be able to pay the water and electricity bill at the end of each month. So I think the funding is a barrier to that* (Participant G).

The evidence so far presents a sector that is subject to the meso agency of government departments and agencies, as the FE sector responds to government reforms and policy techniques put in place to encourage compliance. The accounts from the participants appear to subjugate both their micro and meso agency to either dichotic or strained circumstances in which decisions are made.

There appears to be conflation between the neo-liberal ideals of effectiveness and efficiency, the policy of incorporation, and the policy techniques of restricting the sector through state determined funding formulas. Within this context the meso agency of FE colleges is restricted further through governmentality – in the use of policy techniques which either reward those

colleges who comply and subjugate colleges who choose to 'be on the wrong side of the fence' by withholding the privileges offered to compliant colleges. As a consequence of the above it could be argued that the FE sector is now further fragmented with the onset of the academy status, and that the micro and meso agency of the sector is inhibited by the prevailing performative discourse evident in policy reforms and techniques governing the sector.

However, the participants themselves as policy actors bear responsibility for how they enact policy. How they do so, and in particular, to what extent they assert agency will be explored next.

## 5.5 Agency (micro/meso/macro)

The notion of whether an individual has agency in the decisions they make and the actions they take is a nuanced one. It relies on the individual's perception of what 'agency' means and how far reaching they expect their agency to govern. What started to emerge during the embryonic stages of the data analysis is that a one or two dimensional approach to looking at participant's notion of agency would not suffice. Instead, to truly understand and appreciate the participant's relation to agency a micro, meso, and macro level approach would need to be adopted (Thorpe and Burns, 2016). The micro level for the two FE colleges is translated into the individual level and departmental level: how the participants as individuals interpret and enact government and local level college policy. It was important to determine how distinct or similar were their interpretations of policy in comparison to the department they worked within, or compared to the meso level of the college as a whole.

The meso level is translated into looking at the institutions and agencies that govern and shape the consultation process and the policy; this includes the local college level and the wider sector agencies and organisations, such as Ofsted, government departments and membership organisations including trade unions. To complete the approach the macro level is also

considered: this interpretation is more theoretical and discursive as it considers an appreciation of both the political ideologies that may influence and govern education policy, and the less overt discourses that present certain regimes of truth which dominant the culture of the teaching profession, and make alternate interpretations and manifestations of teaching professionals inferior (O'Leary, 2013).

In terms of the micro level, there is a marked difference between how participants from the two colleges (teacher, line/middle managers, SLT) and FE sector participants (representatives from membership organisations, government department & independent consultant) referred to themselves in terms of whose views they were representing and experiences they were sharing. Participants from the two colleges tended to respond as individuals, referring to 'I', whereas the participants from the FE organisations, agencies and departments, either expressed views in reference to a team, or in the case of the membership organisations, would refer to the organisation as a whole. In addition, they would often refer to the FE sector as a collective by using the catchall term of 'sector' in their responses, which included reference to the institutions as well as the teaching and management workforce that resides within the institutions.

Participants from the two colleges were clear in their accounts of where they had limited or no agency, but less assertive in their examples of when they exercised agency. A teacher and tutor, who had declared they had a SpLD, shared this prescriptive example of the expectations of them as a teacher in the FE sector:

> *I have to set core assignments at set times in the year and I have to mark those in accordance with the exam board specification, and I have to teach at a certain rate that is in line with the rest of the department, in [names subject] we are very prescribed… we all know what we should be doing based on our training, what Ofsted are looking for and what the EQR [External Quality Review] are looking for, so you know titles for the lessons, whether the learning objectives were met, mixture of teacher talk, group work, written, watching a documentary or whatever…* (Participant I).

When asked whether they had any freedom in the delivery of teaching lessons, they stated:

> *I make my own booklets and I make them how I like... Yep, complete freedom in the class the way I teach it* (Participant I).

The statements above illustrate the nuances in the level of agency; it could be interpreted that at the micro level of the classroom the participant is able to exercise significantly more agency than when it comes to asserting influence at the semi-meso 'prescriptive' departmental level. They go on to state the 'prescriptive' nature of the department is not part of a cross college directive by stating: 'I know for instance other departments can do their own thing, in their own way'. Of interest is the micro subversive behaviour when they state:

> *… it can feel at times that we are putting in a core assignment at a time that is not really right and at times I have just ignored it and managed to go under the radar with the things that I am doing. But it is frustrating...*

> *They have said to us as part-timers, where I have had issues with a UCAS statement coming in on a day off and trying to meet that three day programme, I just sent it late and said I am part-time. I couldn't do it. No, I don't think… the thing at [names College] this is how things are and this is how they have always been and this is how they will stay and that UCAS system is how it is, it is a three day turnaround and that is what it is* (Participant I).

Agency is exercised, but the level of interpretation is limited to avoidance rather than an overt alternative solution being actioned. Albeit it could be argued the act of avoidance is still an example of what Riseborough calls 'contained' strategies, 'fitting in without introducing pressure for radical change', and supports the view that policy authors cannot fully control the reading of a text (Riseborough, 1992, cited in Ball, 1994:19). Although they go on to exclaim 'this is how things are' there is some evidence of exercising agency in the example of the late submission of UCAS statements. Interestingly, the position of 'this is how things are' could be understood as a policy technique in as much as the position maintains the College's status quo. However, there are further examples of participants exerting micro agency in a subversive form, as

demonstrated below in the account from a middle and line manager on the requirement to provide progression grades.

> *… I would be critical with things like we give these progression review grades we have to give a current grade, an effort grade and an estimated grade and what we are told to put as a current grade I just don't agree with and in [names subject] we don't really do what we are meant to do... some of it works very well, some of it feels that it shouldn't be one size fits all, but then there is scope to give your opinion and there is scope to ignore what you have been told to do (smiles), so which then means it doesn't seem that restrictive when I talk to some of my colleagues that work in schools*
> (Participant C).

In response to their claim, there is 'scope to ignore what you have been told to do', a follow up question was presented on whether they had the 'real freedom' to interpret the review grading policy or did it just go under the radar; they responded with the following:

> *No, hopefully it wouldn't be picked up on, I do think a lot of what we do is that we worry about litigious parents, or just in general parents that might get their lawyer onto us. So it does mean there are certain things that I stick to, even though I wouldn't want to for example we mustn't give them a lower estimated grade then the current grade... you know but so there are some things are department stick to even though we are not happy with it…*
> (Participant C).

This is a particularly interesting statement, as the perceived restriction on agency moves beyond the localised micro and meso and out into the public arena where the micro agency of parents is identified as a restriction, with the notion of 'litigious parents'. Firstly, if teachers are having to enhance review grades, whom is the process meant to benefit; it appears to be no more than a nod to the performative expectations of quality assurance, with little regard for a true account of student development. The insistence of the review grades is caught up in the performative wrongheadedness that the grade alone can prove student progression. The review grade therefore in itself becomes a policy technique, and a technique that supports a regime of

truth of performance, that bears little reality to understanding the progress that a student is making, or indeed any summative grade they may achieve.

However, participants shared examples of where agency appeared to be more fluid, in particular accounts of lesson observation frameworks and practice were described as appreciative of a number of contextual variables. A former principal shared their thoughts on the importance of asserting agency in considering the context of a lesson observation:

> *… the context is important and certain things, some of the students doing A level sociology are a different kettle of fish to someone who is building bloody cars and who cannot bear the idea of sitting there on a chair, the rules are a bit different and if you don't reflect on that a bit you are crazy, you cannot straitjacket to be exactly the same, it is getting the core together but leaving enough room on the edges for people to put a bit of a stamp on* (Participant F).

Their account implies that teachers could exercise agency at the micro level in order to contextualise their lessons. However, when participants were asked if they were aware of any such contextual agency, they replied with the following:

> *Not really, we all know each year there is a lesson observation, sometimes it is within your department so it will be your* [Line Manager], *or we do the cross college ones, it is informing your professional review because now we have a box on our professional review to respond to our lesson observation on the feedback we got and the targets we might be working towards* (Participant K).

In addition, when the middle manager with external inspection responsibility, was asked if in their experience lesson observation protocol and policy differed from the Ofsted guidance, they had the following to say:

> *I think most people follow the Ofsted model. Now what has been interesting is Ofsted have abandon compulsory grading of lessons, and colleges have one by one followed suit* (Participant H).

Of interest, the FE & HE consultant claims Ofsted does not expect colleges to follow a particular lesson observation process.

> *Ofsted will say to you though that all Ofsted will ever look at are outcomes and impact, how a college goes about getting that impact or developing those outcomes is up to the college* (Participant M).

The prevailing influence of Ofsted is evident in participant's accounts, but never more starkly than in the observation from the participant who holds an external inspection role, of the decision for colleges to follow Ofsted's example and cease the grading of individual lesson observations. It could be argued in reference to Perryman *et al*. (2018) that the Ofsted inspection has through a series of regimes and techniques become normalised practice, the inspection process becomes a form of governmentality. Therefore, if the process changes colleges will respond by emulating the change in an attempt to ensure they are inspection ready and compliant.

In order to explore the notion of agency in a holistic way, participants were also asked about the other roles they held and whether they had more agency to interpret process and policy in their additional roles. There appeared to be some commonality in the level of agency experienced in the additional role of tutor for the teacher participants. Further interesting use of language by a teacher and tutor in their claim they are not 'free enough' to adapt the material for pastoral tutor sessions:

> *No. I tend not to, I tend to get a bit nervous not doing it, you know, if I am told to do something I tend to do it, I just skip through slides or not show*

> *videos, but no I am not free enough to do that I tend to do what I am told to do* (Participant I).

They do not elaborate on the restriction, however it could be argued that limited agency is self-inflicted if we consider the response from a middle manager who is a tutor at the same institution.

> *I have the confidence to select carefully what I do from the PDP* [tutor pack], *I promised my tutor group at the start that I would not patronise them and so I skip the stuff at the start which is patronising, or not helpful to them, or if I have to do it with them, I do it and make it very clear why...*
>
> *… the Prevent strategy, it was very dry and I thought how am I going to deliver this to them, I found a case study on Youtube related to it and asked the tutor group what would they have done and we had a really good discussion* (Participant H).

There is a nuance here as the key word appears to be 'confidence'; the middle manager elaborates further, and although there is no mention of an explicit directive to deliver the tutorial material as is, other tutors referred to below and the teacher and tutor above, share the same perceived lack of agency:

> *My tutor group is up in the* [subject area] *department and I know the other tutors there do not feel confident to change the tutor material. They listen to me how I deliver the tutor content and say to me why we can't deliver it that way* (Participant H).

In addition, a participant who has tutorial cross college responsibility at the same college, in response to the question of whether tutors interpreted the material, had the following to say:

> *I would definitely say there is an interpretative point to it, but I think that's because they are going to know that student better, it is not a one size fits all, it is a guideline of what we would expect and so you got to sort of put your trust in... but I think it is applied differently, as you get different teaching styles you get different tutor styles, some maybe more lenient, some maybe*

*more sympathetic, some may stick to the letter in the black and white policy, and so it is going to be interpretative* (Participant K).

On initially reading the responses from both it could be argued that the lack of agency example referred to by middle manager (Participant H), and the teacher and tutor's (Participant I) own perception of not being 'free enough', is a self-inflicted restriction at the individual micro level of agency. Such a position would support Barthes notion of 'readerly' readers of the tutorial policy text, where an individual accepts the text as is (Barthes, cited in Bowe *et al*., 1992). However, it is important to appreciate at this juncture that the middle manager may be used to exercising more agency, and the pastoral lead (Participant K) may have more of an insight into the tutorial policy directive, enabling both to be more 'writerly' readers of the tutorial policy text where they can be active in their reading and interpretation of the policy.

In addition, a further point of note is the changing face of teacher professionalism since incorporation. Bathmaker and Avis (2013) found in their longitudinal study from 2002-2010 the existence of tension between two discourses of teacher professionalism: 'Organisational Professionalism' and 'Personal Professionalism'. The former is where professional teacher agency is restricted at the meso level by government and non-ministerial agencies such as Ofsted, a sort of top down approach. The latter is a more nuanced form of professionalism with higher levels of agency adopted at the micro individual level. The eroding of teacher agency and in particular professional autonomy is documented in much of the literature (See: Bathmaker & Avis 2013; Holloway & Brass, 2018; Hoyle & Wallace, 2005; Lucas & Crowther 2015; Shain & Gleeson, 1999; Spenceley 2006; Stoten 2013). It could be argued that the perception of lack of agency from the perspective of the teacher and tutor, and those tutors who are also teachers referred to by the middle manager (Participant H), is a consequence of the increased scrutiny of and enforced regulation of teaching professionals within the FE sector from successive governments; most notably the New Right Conservative government under Margaret Thatcher (Thatcher's reign 1979-1991) and the performance driven audit culture of the New Labour government 1997-2010. At the macro level, in a performative culture meeting standards and criteria is rewarded, such a context is not conducive to encouraging initiative and agency at an

individual micro level and may explain why lay teachers choose to follow the letter unless instructed otherwise.

Although Bathmaker and Avis (2013) alert us to the tension between managing both personal and organisational professionalism, there appears to be something much greater here to consider at the macro level: the dominance of performative discourse and ideology. It is the prevailing and dominant performative discourse that has led to a perverse 'cult of the performative teacher', where teachers feel unable to exercise their professional agency. They perform to the ideal compliant teacher projected in the policy and policy techniques that have dominated the FE sector since the 1990s - even when not directed to do so. Englund and Gerdin (2019:504-505) argue that the psychological mechanisms that the techniques appeal to encourage teachers, through the process of 'mirroring' and 'self-identification', to embrace performative techniques and in doing so teachers become complicit in the subjectification process. The accounts by both the middle manager and the teacher with a cross college pastoral role illustrate 'mirroring' and 'self-identification' in the adoption of techniques which normalised compliance, and in so doing avoided the judgment of absent others: those who created and sanctioned the tutorial material.

In addition, the matter of professional agency is raised by a former senior policy manager from a membership organisation. Of interest is a nod to the performative culture that resides in the FE sector, and the ability of staff to perform to a set of criteria, but not to assert themselves when it comes to exercising agency. The account supports the position that teaching professionals are now at best inhibited and at worst disabled by performative policy and performative discourse.

> *And it is the same… it comes back to this command and control hierarchal structure… it occurs in education you know those big organisations that are complex and have those hierarchal levels. People work to the glass ceiling of what they are banded at and wait to be told by their management teams or by their superiors on what to do next or what to do in certain circumstances* (Participant G).

In the accounts from participants discussed thus far, notions of agency have been situated within the meso level of the FE colleges. Although variant examples of micro and meso levels of agency are shared by the participants, a prevailing regime of truth in the form of the Ofsted inspection framework appears to dominate the context in which decisions are made. However, to leave the exploration here would be disingenuous; micro and meso agency extends beyond the confines of the FE college. For this reason the next sub-heading explores the variant levels of agency exercised by the FE sector organisations, agencies, and departments.

## 5.6 Limited agency at the FE sector meso level

The matter is much more nuanced than top down government agency control, as often government department policy makers and government funded agencies, such as Ofsted, are also restricted at the meso level of agency. To illustrate this point, the former DfE policy officer states schools and colleges' perception of Ofsted's meso agency over government policy decisions and vice versa is misaligned with the reality:

> *Ofsted is an entirely separate organisation over there and we are not in a position at this point in the organisation* [as the DfE] *to walk over and say we want you to do this and there is probably a point when the minister might be able to put pressure on the HMCI to be able to set their requirements, but even that would be dubious. Ofsted is supposed to be an independent body, it is not a political body, although a lot of people rightly or wrongly think that it is political but it is not part of the department* [DfE], *it is not supposed to follow minister's direction. It is supposed to be this independent thing that looks at the evidence and works out what is the best way to run a school and then says this is what we need to see. So there is no point going to a government department and saying tell Ofsted to do this because that is not how it works* (Participant R).

Conversely:

> *Ofsted have their own research arms and they will look into the data behind it and will work out their best approach… but something like the reform of the A Level that is a department* [DfE] *policy so the department will say we are going to change A Levels or introduce T Levels or we are going to do this or that and then it is Ofsted's role to then inspect that to the highest standards possible. So they are not going to say well we do not agree with the implementation of the new A Levels, well too bad that is not your business… So they will set their own agenda and sometimes it can be in response to government policy like that was but yeah they are related they are not suddenly going to start issuing political statements saying we think what the government has done is wrong…* (Participant R).

A senior policy manager also comments on the limitations of Ofsted's agency:

> *So, when you look at policy, Ofsted are there to inspect based on FE policy, so often they are not making the policy themselves, they are inspecting according to the guidelines* (Participant E).

The matter is nuanced further, according to the FE and HE consultant, in the paradoxical position between those that manage the FE sector and those that regulate it:

> *Further education is highly regulated, it is highly regulated by a whole range of bodies, the FE commissioner, Ofsted, Education and Skills funding agency, OFQUAL, the list is endless, it is a kind of top down regulation and I think a lot of colleges perceive themselves initially as responding to that regulation… Regulators try to regulate it* [FE] *but they can't because they are not direct managers of it and the only people who manage it are those people in FE, but they can only do it in the light of in the way they are regulated* (Participant M).

The insights provided by both assist in understanding the complexities surrounding the notion of agency. Government departments such as the DfE and non-ministerial organisations like Ofsted albeit have agency at the meso level, however their agency is not all encompassing,

they are bound by the remit and regulations of their organisations governance and do not have carte blanche.

The meso level of agency is complicated further in one recurring theme identified by a number of participants. The 'will' of the Minister for Education was cited as a key determinate in policy direction and generation. A principal stated the following:

> … *you can have a secretary of state for education who introduces all sorts of things good or bad by the time they are implemented they have left office, and that has obviously happened with the linear A Levels and Gove, we are living with the consequences of really one person's vision* (Participant O).

A senior policy manager adds the caveat that attention needs to be paid to how government departments are consulting; for them the key issue is whether the consultation process is an open or closed one:

> *In terms of like a truly democratic process we have a minister in charge of departments and it is democratic in terms of we have voted them into their positon, but then not every decision is broken down into a truly democratic act is it, but I think when it comes to consultations, you have got to look at the area and look at where they have written the consultation in a way that is truly open or not* (Participant E).

The matter of the consultation process will be explored in Chapter 7, for now the focus will remain on the individual micro agency of the minster. Of interest the former DfE policy officer also refers to 'democracy' in their explanation of the policy officer role to interpret the wishes of the minister:

> … *the policy officers do not express their own view… they are there to interpret the wishes of the minister, because fundamentally it comes down to this thing of who is the person who has been elected here, we live in a democracy, the minister whether you like it or not is the elected official here. If they say this is what we should do we have to interpret that, so the job of*

*the policy officer whether they are senior or junior is to understand and interpret the ministers will if you like…* (Participant R)

Albeit it is noted that within government departments and government funded agencies, agency is confined to the remit of the organisation, an interesting example of micro agency by a senior civil servant in response to a minster for education directive, was shared.

*… the Secretary of State wants to introduce T Levels by the 2019 or 2020, they said no* [Permanent Secretary, senior civil servant] *I think you should delay it by another year because things are not going to be ready, but actually for various reasons the Secretary of State said no I want a few courses to run from this September. And they had this discussion back and forth internally and in the end he* [Permanent Secretary for the Civil Service] *wrote a letter to the Secretary of State saying I understand… I have laid out all my concerns, I understand you want to go ahead with it anyway... perhaps you see the wider political picture which I do not have and I am willing to take your lead on this obviously because I have to, but I want you to provide a written instruction to do so, he then got a reply back from the Secretary of State… I do have a wider political view thank you very much and I want you to go ahead with it with the way I have said…*

*…what that means is, if and when anything goes wrong with that policy the Permanent Secretary is basically going he told me and here is the letter that proves it and I showed him that it was going to go wrong* (Participant R).

However, what is clear in the example above is that although the caution is raised and noted, the outcome is still the same. The evidence goes some way to supporting the argument put forth by Dale (1989) that policy 'gets done to' those working in the sector, and in this case working in organisations responsible for generating policy for the sector.

The reformed A Level policy was cited by many of the participants as a clear example of the 'one vision' mentality of the then Secretary of State for Education, Michael Gove. In particular

participants took exception to the policy directive to reform the A Level programme being signed off without any consultation with the sector. Participants were clear in their responsibility to manage the implementation of the A Level policy and the agency they had over the shape of the implementation.

One principal stated:

> *… there is an external agenda we can't change an external agenda, so for example the introduction of Linear A Levels well there is nothing we can do to influence that as a policy, whatever we feel about it. What we can do is think about what does that mean to us and how do we react to that as a staff. So to take that example we consulted about the various delivery models…* (Participant O).

On the question of whether the government consulted on A Level reform, they provided some further detail on the limited agency their college had over the decision:

> *… they collated the individual responses from colleges but it wasn't do you think this is a good idea… it was about the co-teach-ability of the AS and the full A Level, the structural decisions and the impact, how would it alter your study programmes in terms of three A Levels, four A Levels etc, etc... It was much more about the detail of the implementation rather than philosophically do you think Linear A Levels are a good idea, because Gove's agenda was so clear that was the direction of travel.* (Participant O).

The participant has made an interesting distinction here: the philosophical reasoning on the value of returning to Linear A Level appeared to not be up for discussion or debate, as the perception is that the directive had been decided prior to formal consultation on implementation. What is absent in both the responses from the middle and senior managers from the two colleges, and from the wider FE participants, is any real understanding of the purpose, or indeed benefits behind the decision to return to the Linear A Level. Of interest, one of the participants, a senior policy manager, offered the following rationale for why opinions of the suitability of the reform were not solicited.

> *… if you look at the welter of evidence, if you look at the composition of the consultation responses it was absolutely clear that the vast majority of*

*people didn't want a return to a Linear A level, so you then conclude from that why then would you consult? If you consult and the vast majority of respondents say we do not want this to happen and you do it anyway, you might as well not have consulted and it damages the creditability of the consultation process* (Participant Q).

More damning is the response by the middle manager in a cross college role:

*I got annoyed about the whole change of linear A Level, okay fine if we want to go back down that road… I thought why are you doing this, are you trying to prove something, like these qualifications are too easy, we have to make them harder, and particularly kids who don't function under pressure and struggle with time management and all of that, suddenly they have to do everything after two years, which really punishes those with certain learning needs* (Participant B).

Albeit the response does not explicitly address agency, and could be argued to be a point about inclusion, it does call attention to Ball's word of caution around Barthes notion of 'readerly' and 'writerly' readers of policy text (Bathes, cited in Bowe, *et al*.,1992). Ball argues that although policy may be interpreted as 'textual interventions of practice' their [teachers] own enactment of the policy is 'not constructed in circumstances of their own making' (Ball, 1994:18). In other words, what is clear in all participant responses where the matter of the A Level reform is discussed, is the opportunity to exercise agency is limited to the implementation stage of the policy. In addition, there is further tension in trying to understand the reasoning behind the decision and whom the change is therefore meant to benefit, with some grave concerns about the inclusivity of the policy. The limited agency on the direction of policy is echoed in the responses from the wider FE participants. The two senior policy mangers provided similar accounts of the education policy fait accompli:

*... I think there is an interesting question there about how policy is developed and formulated, to what extent does it come from the top down and to what extent does it come from the bottom up… I think the issue with consultations and Ofsted I think are good at this... the Department for Education* (DfE) *are less good, is that it depends how the formal consultation is framed and often*

> *what they will do is developing a consultation that is… it gives you a very clear sense of their preferred direction of travel... and what often happens or increasingly happens is that they consult on the detail of implementation rather than the policy direction itself* (Participant Q).

> *So I suppose that depends on whether you are spoken to before a policy is decided on or not… but it is dependent on how the policy document has been framed and written in the first place, there are some policy documents that you read where it is just written in a way that can only be answered in a positive frame, or it is asking the wrong questions... it also depends if something has been put out into legislation there is very little room for manoeuvre is there, where policy makers in Westminster are concerned* (Participant E).

There are some parallels between the fluid exercise of agency in the FE sector and within the FE colleges included in this research. In both instances they are often asserting agency at the level of implementation. In the colleges they managed the implementation of educational reform with the return to Linear A Levels. Ofsted similarly would have had agency over any inspection framework adjustments that may have been necessary following the A Level reform. Of interest, is the prevailing acceptance of change through the act of implementation: Perryman *et al*. (2018) in reference to Ceplak (2012) argue that through the operation of 'soft power' colleges, and in application to this research, the FE sector readily adapts to changing policy. Therefore, rather than simply being controlled by the system, the sector will manage the implementation of change and in doing so assert 'soft power' (Ceplak, 2012, cited in Perryman *et al*., 2018: 149).

What has been presented so far is a more complex picture of agency, with early signs that micro agency in the form of the 'will' of the Minster for Education could be just as influential as the meso agency of FE organisations and agencies. In the next sub-heading the micro and

meso levels of agency will be addressed further in the exploration of how two FE colleges organise and manage the policy process at the meso level of the institution.

## 5.7 Agency and college directed policy

As part of the implementation of the A Level reform colleges had to make decisions about how they would identify opportunities to mark and monitor progression, now that the AS modular exam had been abolished. The participants shared examples of how at both the meso and micro level progression grades were obtained and managed.

> *A good example would be because of the return of linear A Levels we needed a progression exam and so myself and* [mentions another Middle Manager] *were tasked with coming up with a policy for progression exams. So* [line managers] *know what they should be doing as a progression exam, how they should be marked, standardised, so we kind of did the whole process… yeah, we had to choose our words carefully, so it would be things like saying, the exam you set at the end of the first year should be at an appropriate level of difficulty. If we say that, that gives* [line managers] *some wriggle room* (Participant H, Middle Manager & External Inspection Role).

The notion of 'wriggle room' was supported by one of the line managers and middle managers:

> *… obviously* [line managers] *are going to be managing their courses in different ways... but I think there is a lot of different types of practice in different areas I don't think kind of coherent way of doing things yet, I think because everyone is feeling their way…* (Participant B).

Another middle manager had this to add regarding the level of agency managers could exercise:

> *… we are giving a lot of guidance on what the progression guidance should look like and with the lesson observations a lot of guidance on that, but there is a lot of freedom within that framework* (Participant C).

Although some micro department agency was encouraged in the planning of what the actual progression exam would look like, the senior leadership team gave teaching staff only one dedicated day to mark. Interestingly, a teacher and tutor participant stated the teaching department they worked in was informed by their line manager not to mark over a holiday period.

> *… this decision has been made and* [line manager] *doesn't support it and we are not to do any marking over half term… We have had it unofficially that it is unlikely we will be able to make the deadline and [line manager] said [line manager] doesn't want us to mark over half term, though when it comes to it whether we have the guts to not meet that deadline I am not sure. Because that is student reports going out with no grades on* (Participant I).

Furthermore, a line and middle manager had the following to say about the limited official marking time:

> *… we did have a day put aside, the challenge with it was, we did ask for a bit more time but there wasn't time in the schedule and I think people were frustrated… because it is reformed subjects it takes longer to mark…*
> (Participant C).

The points raised by the participants regarding progression exam policy will be addressed further in an exploration of the consultation process in Chapter7. For now, what is of interest is the macro influence of policy process techniques evident in the restricting of agency to the implementation of policy. Foucault's concept of governmentality and in particular the analytics of government approach provide a tool to aid understanding as to why regimes of practice operate at both the micro and meso levels of agency (Foucault, 1982). Participants have been critical in regards to their agency being restricted to the implementation stage of policy. Paradoxically, what is evident in the responses from participants working in the FE colleges is the same regime of practice being adopted by senior and middle management in the creation of policy, leaving line managers and teachers the responsibility of managing only the implementation of college policy.

Following the 1992 F&H Act colleges became incorporated, resulting in greater levels of autonomy for principals' and the governing body to manage the institution as they saw fit. Colleges became self-governing institutions, responsible for management of staff and students, their own finances, and wider business matters (Lucas & Crowther, 2016; Simmons, 2008). With incorporation came greater autonomy at the meso level of agency, however a senior policy manager raises an interesting paradox as a result of the increase in agency and decision making:

> *… one of the issues with autonomy is that no-one tells you what to do, so there are lots of reinventing of the wheel that goes on across the sector… But that autonomy is a strength but sometimes is a challenge but sometimes it would be helpful to just be told what to do I think colleges think sometimes actually if there was just a rule and we had to do it that way… so autonomy is great but it does have its drawbacks* (Participant Q).

The notion of agency through the form of autonomy is disputed in much of the literature (See: Lucas & Crowther, 2016; Gleeson & Shain, 1999; Lucas & Mace, 1999, cited in Lucas & Crowther, 2016). The main crux of the dispute lies in the rhetoric of incorporation that colleges should be able to compete in the truest sense of the 'free market'. The reality is that FE colleges cannot determine their market price and sector funding is controlled by the government. Moreover, government intervention in the form of pushing particular FE policy has left colleges thinking seriously about whether they can truly assert their meso agency in sticking to what they believe is the best for their college, or whether they should toe the line to avoid losing out. Pressure to conform to government preferred education policy direction was raised by participants. A principal had the following to say about the consequence of not moving over to the new version of the Applied General qualifications:

> *… at that time you could choose whether you moved to the new ones or stayed with the old ones, and we stayed with the legacy because the new ones include an external exam and the legacy ones don't. And the penalty for not moving to the new ones is that your data does not appear in the national tables, it is not on performance tables, but it is still funded* (Participant O).

Another ‘penalty’ example was provided by a vice principal in their account of the introduction of the T Levels:

> *We will try to avoid the T Level route if we possibly can. As a qualification it is a dog’s breakfast, you have got all this maths and English, some of it is assessed, pass, merit and distinction, some of it is assessed A to E, it is a mess... What the government haven’t decided yet whether or not to force people to take up T Levels, they are going to stop funding the BTECs, stop recognising them, we don’t know what they are going to do* (Participant P).

What is particularly disconcerting is some of the language used by the participants in their accounts: ‘penalty’, ‘force’, ‘get trampled on’. What they are describing in a colloquial form are the policy techniques in operation to encourage performative compliance. Albeit there are micro and meso levels of agency at work here, they are often relegated to either acts of resistance, or implementation of policy where the individual or institution has not contributed to the policy form.

## 5.8 Summary

In summary of Chapter 5, there is clear evidence of policy techniques at both the micro and meso levels of the policy process, starting first with the policy technique of inspecting the quality of teaching and learning in the form of lesson observations. Although challenges are presented by participants regarding the dominance of Ofsted policy preoccupation, with a national benchmark of measuring quality, the technique of the Ofsted framework appeared to be accepted as normative practice by all participants. Rote responses were provided by participants from the FE colleges regarding what they should include in lesson observations, albeit some of performative expectations of adhering to mandatory policy, such as Prevent, were expressed with some frustration. The lesson observation technique was used to shift the responsibility of government duties, such as the Prevent duty, from the meso college governance level to the micro level of individual teachers. The Prevent duty, amongst other mandatory criteria, features in the rote description by participants of what they are expected to include in each lesson. However, in reference to both the Ofsted FE and Skills Handbook (2019), and the Prevent duty as outlined in section 26 of the Act (*Counter-Terrorism and*

*Security Act 2015*), the burden of the Prevent duty is explicitly documented as the responsibility of leadership and management and those who govern FE institutions, and not just individual teachers. The revised Prevent duty guidance for England and Wales, states four expectations of leadership (Home Office, 2019a:16; 2019b; 2019c).

This thesis argues the technique of including the duty in lesson observation process reduces the duty to a performative tick box exercise, and holds teachers culpable for meeting the duty requirements. The expectations of the Prevent duty are absorbed in teaching and learning practice, with all teachers including those with SpLDs subject to meeting the duty, resulting in the very real risk that those who do not incorporate the duty, as well as other duties, may fall foul of the technique, and potentially may be unfairly graded down because they have not met the criteria.

Notwithstanding, there is evidence of agency when it came to the individual micro level, albeit they did appear not to appreciate the acts they shared as evidence of agency and policy interpretation. Interestingly, at no point did any of the policy actors question the homogenous figure of a teaching professional they were describing, even those who acknowledged the need for resilience strategies, expressed in the accounts from participants who teach and manage in the two FE colleges. Furthermore, the evidence presented would suggest that colleges are not 'free' to exercise their meso agency in determining the best qualification structure, nor indeed their preferred type of institution. Contrary to Braun *et al's*. (2010) claim that teachers, managers, and other education workers are 'key actors' in the policy cycle process, the evidence presented here would argue that colleges are subjugated to the will of the government if they wish to be on the 'right side of the fence'.

It is important to note that much of the critical educational literature places an intentional eroding of FE education at the feet of policy makers, government organisations and agencies, such as DfE and Ofsted. Teachers are often represented as being subjectivised by performative discourse and technologies. The tone of the literature identifies teachers as a homogenous collective, one which holds true the virtues of pedagogy, and whose sole concern is improving

the educational outcomes of their students. However, the evidence presented in this thesis portrays a more inclusive collective of policy actors who demonstrate a real concern and commitment to ensuring the very best outcomes for students. This thesis argues the omnipresence of post-panoptic performativity (Perryman *et al.*, 2018) extends beyond teachers and managers who work in FE colleges, and includes all FE sector policy actors. Albeit, it could be argued they were blindsided by the belief that a teacher's experience is a homogenous one. The real flaw in the presumption is that of context: if the contextual differences between 'inclusive' and 'exclusive' institutions were considered then the premise of the belief would collapse. In addition, statistical comparisons at the micro level of teachers within the same institution and against different institutions, and the meso comparisons between the overall results of FE institutions, work as an effective technique in supporting the governmentality of the Ofsted national framework. Participants in this thesis normalised the practice of comparisons in their accounts, advocating and discussing freely the benefits of comparisons both at the micro (between teachers) and meso (between institutions) level.

The next chapter (Chapter 6) explores the practice of policy actors in response to accountability frameworks in their adoption of quality assurance measures, such as Ofsted grades and Value Added scores. The purpose and benefits of the measures are drawn out in terms of whether the policy actors believe the measures are there to prove or improve student outcomes and outputs. Within the accountability discourse techniques such as comparisons between teachers and institutions is common practice; the policy actor participants express their thoughts and experiences on the value of technique. In addition, notions of trust are presented; these developed organically in the interview process with several of the policy actor participants raising concerns about the FE sector being a 'low trust' environment. Central to Chapter 6 is the juxtaposition between techniques of proof and notions of improvement; both are explored and challenged in this thesis, positioning techniques of proof and improve as a double sided coin.

# Chapter 6: Accountability and Trust

## 6.1 Introduction

The language of accountability and trust often appeared to be interwoven for a number of the participants interviewed. In particular, participants were more inclined to refer directly to the notion of trust within the FE sector as a whole. There exists a corpus of literature on the notion of accountability within the compulsory and non-compulsory education sector (see Edginton, 2016; Gilbert, 2012; Hoyle & Wallace, 2005; MacIntrye 1982, 1988; Poulson, 1998; Ranson 2003; Spenceley, 2006; Holloway and Brass, 2018).

The emergence of discussions on trust in this research were organically arrived at; once the matter of trust was raised, further probes were exercised to better understand how the participant had arrived at raising the matter of trust. During the interviews two branches of trust emerged: the first tended to be situated within the context of the college environment, the positioning of whom should be trusted was stated, and the importance of students trusting staff and vice versa was referred to. In addition, the interview data presented some additional nuances, in particular one of the teachers interviewed who had declared they had a SpLD raised the matter of trusting their students enough to declare their SpLD to them. The second emerged when participants raised concerns about what they perceived to be a decline of trust in teaching professionals and the management of FE colleges since incorporation.

Similarly to Poulson (1998), in their research on how teaching professionals perceived accountability and its effect on their professional role and work, the participants in this research were not asked directly about the notion of accountability. However, this emerged both implicitly and explicitly when they recounted experiences of government policy implementation.

## 6.2 Trust and the FE sector

Of interest, a former principal used the word ‘trust’ several times in their description of building trustful relationships at the micro level with teaching staff and governors. In particular, when asked about the internal consultation process for developing college policy at one college, they did not believe staff trusted the messages coming down at the meso level from the senior leadership team.

> *People in the business department, or catering department in* [names college] *talked a different language to what people would be doing in the English and science department. There was so much, not impossible, but so much more difficult and I never quite had a management team* [refers to and names managers] *who were never really on the same wavelength.. I don’t think people trusted the messages that were coming down in different levels at* [names college] *I never quite got the same level of trust that I would of wanted* (Participant F).

They implicitly appear to be placing the perceived lack of trust down to ‘different levels’ but do not acknowledge any responsibility for the lack of trust, or provide detail of whom is represented at the ‘different levels’ - although it could be assumed they are referring to other members of the SLT. Paradoxically, in further references to the word ‘trust’ the former principal states they should be trusted by governors to do what is best when it comes to implementing government and government agency policy.

> *And at times I think it sometimes can come across as an arrogance that is one of the reasons why I would of fallen out with people at [mentions college] to an extent because you are saying to governors that I do know better than Ofsted, or I do know better than you. Because you have to trust me with that and if you don’t it is not going to work, it is a bit of a risk, especially when they are reading papers that say we should be doing it this way or that, for me to be saying, no trust me, we can subvert that we don’t*

*have to do it exactly as they are saying in fact it could be better if we do this, cause it gets easier after you have won a few successes* (Participant F).

In further reference to teaching staff, they had this to say about trusting staff to do their job:

*If learning has been arrived at, if learning has taken place, I am fairly comfortable in how you have arrived at that that is no formula you don't have to have a starter activity, you don't have to have an activity where students are using post-it notes… if the end product is good then I will trust your professional judgement on how you have arrived at tha*t (Participant F).

Their account presents a situation where it would appear at every layer of the post incorporated college trust was not a given. Earning trust is presented as a complex and nuanced matter. Ranson (2003), in reference to Foucault, argues that since the mid-1970s 'accountability as a social practice' has emboldened two characters: the 'judicative' (establishing norms, controls and exclusions), and the 'veridicative' (true/false discourse) (Ranson, 2003:462). Accountability frameworks are set by the government and in doing so they set the context and discourse in which teachers work. In the above account, and in the account by other participants outlined below, performative accountability sets the 'judicative' character of FE colleges, leaving little room for exercising 'trust' for a college to operate in an alternate ways.

The FE and HE consultant made a link between trust and innovation:

*… the type today in which we manage has lessened the trust… it might have lessened innovation which might be associated with trust, if you trust you should allow innovation shouldn't you… yeah… it is a difficult one. The real outstanding colleges actually do innovate and trust, they create cultures of change and support for those people within the organisation. But there are some that get themselves into that outstanding and then all they do is try and reinforce being outstanding… as they reinforce what they think is outstanding behaviours they lose that innovation, they lose that trust, and therefore they dropped back into requires improvement* (Participant M).

Furthermore, one of the senior policy managers extended the notion of a lack of trust across the English education sector:

> *English system is a low trust system if you look at other systems internationally they are much higher trust systems, they basically say here are the resources and we monitor the outcomes not the outputs, we trust you to deliver the outcomes, but because we work in a low trust system you have lots of controls and performance measures and levers that policy makers and politicians can then play with to try and get the results that they want. I think it all boils down to trust at the end of the day doesn't it… (*Participant E).

On further probing around the notion of trust, and in particular trust between government departments, government accountability measures, and colleges, they had this to say:

> *In terms of trust that sort of change takes five, twenty years to change doesn't it so I think that it is partly to do with trust but then measuring the right things in the first place isn't it. So when we get our accountability measures across schools, colleges, private training providers and we are trying to measure everything based on academic baselines… when it comes to trust in the system that is just going to take decades to mature* (Participant E).

The former principal expanded on the notion of trust to include wider public sector occupations in his recounting of the FE sector post incorporation:

> *The lack of trust in the profession has not been unique to teachers there are all sorts of professions that they have to be accountable to results, again since the 1990s the public sector there has basically been a lack of trust…*
>
> *… since 1992 that there has been a real push on efficiency and effectiveness, money has got tighter, therefore there has been big studies done before 1993 before incorporation, I mean there was some scandalous*

> *waste of public money, kids dropping out of colleges, before the introduction of things like BTECs, if you weren't up for A Levels then there wasn't much for you and if a teacher wanted to carry on teaching the way they had for the past 15 years there was very little pressure on you to do much different… but the thing swung far too far the other way…* (Participant F).

The 'scandalous waste of public money' referred to, is echoed in Simmon's (2008) review of the perceived 'golden years' of pre-incorporated colleges under local government control. However, as the former principal observes, the literature supports the view that incorporation swung things too far the other way. In particular, a new type of management emerged following incorporation, NPM from the 1990s onwards dominated education policy discourse (see Lucas & Crowther 2016; Lucas & Mace, 1999; Metcalf & Richards, 1987, cited in Randle & Brady, 1997; Pollitt, 1990, cited in Randle & Brady, 1997). NPM was concerned with applying commercial market model techniques and principles to the education sector. Pollitt (1990) argued that NPM discourse underpinned the belief that 'good management' would deliver a more effective and efficient workforce (Pollitt, 1990, citied in Randle & Brady, 1997:125). In the event of NPM discourse what followed was an acceleration of accountability, measured in the form of quantitative indicators. This coupled with the shifting perception by the public of teaching professionals in the wake of Jim Callaghan's 1976 speech, made it easier for successive governments to introduce more punitive techniques of accountability for the FE sector (Ranson, 2003; Spenceley 2006).

Interestingly, in response to a question on what are the markers of a good and or, an effective FE college, a middle manager responded at a more micro level by talking about trust and the student, teacher relationship:

> *I think one of the absolutely core basis of a good teacher is trust, do the students trust the teacher, you build it up, once they are convinced that the teacher knows what they are talking about, they trust you. They also have to see that you are fair* (Participant H).

Conversely, a teacher and tutor participant, stated they trusted the students they had declared their SpLD status to, believing that the action of declaring provided for their students a positive sanction of teacher-student trust. Moreover, they believed the reciprocal relationship of trust empowered both them and their students.

> *I am open with my students that I am dyslexic, I say it in my first lesson… students who are dyslexic in the class can see they react to it when the teacher says at the beginning of the lesson. I say it because I speak very fast, I get my numbers wrong on the board, I say things wrong, last lesson said the wrong [names content] it was completely wrong but they feel really comfortable to pick me up on that, I said you need to tell me when I make mistakes, I think they feel quite empowered with that… I trust them, I know that I don't have to worry* (Participant I).

In addition, a vice principal provided an example of what they believed to be an exercise in building trust between senior management and teaching staff:

> *So there was a process of, we started off to see all staff and people would give him a window of time when he could with ungraded lesson observations from the start… So [former Principal] started off by having ungraded lesson observations which I think built some peoples trust as they knew there were* not going to be judged with a number, [former Principal] then said he wanted *come in… And then [former Principal] went into fully unannounced lesson observations, it was a gradual process, first we are going to stop grading it, then give people a choice, a bit of a window and then it was I will come in whenever I like and [former Principal] did it three cycles in the eight years [s/he] was here* (Participant P).

What is of interest here is the belief that trust is demonstrated in the practice of ungraded lesson observations and an 'open door' policy. It could be argued that both are a form of surveillance, and support the regime of truth that the only way to determine a good/effective teacher is to

monitor their performance (O'Leary, 2013). The idea that it is perfectly acceptable for teaching professionals to be placed under surveillance in the way described is a curious notion.

Moreover, what is proposed is not a one off but something that should be expected to happen at any time, without any prior notice. No other profession is put under the same level of scrutiny, including other public sector occupations such as medical professionals. The consequence of such a situation leaves teachers feeling 'responsible' for accommodating other stakeholders outside of the students they teach. The teacher with pastoral responsibility had this to say about 'pleasing everyone' following a question on what might be the potential barriers for a teacher to be 'good'.

> *The time is a biggie and the pressure that comes with then the timing issues and obviously the expectations that you have yourself, your [Line Manager] will have, your governors, students', parents will have, so kind of you are making sure you are pleasing everyone who has got a kind of stake in your institution in some way. And not burning out (laughs)* (Participant K).

Albeit they do not explicitly use the language of accountability, accountable, or state they are 'responsible to', it is implicit in the wording of their response that in some way they believe they are being 'held to account' by every stake holder in the institution in which they work. Ranson (2003) refers to the work of Dunsire (1978) in their elaboration on defining accountability. Albeit Dunsire states that accountability could be interpreted as having to answer questions on a particular event or situation, for the most part there are additional implications for the account to be 'evaluated by the superior or superior body measured against a standard or some expectation' (Dunsire, 1978, cited in Ranson, 2003: 460). Such a process, Dunsire argues, brings with it some form of positive or negative sanction. Ranson (2003) states the process secures performance and ensures compliance; it could be argued that such a process renders professional agency as ineffectual and subjects professional communities to performative techniques. Of interest, the vice principal does acknowledge some 'pockets of resistance' to the 'open door' policy. However, the resistant behaviour appears to be read as defensive, rather

than as Ranson (2003) observes a rejection of 'instrumental rationale and techniques' (Ranson, 2003:460).

> *There is that horrible phrase, buy-in here, but I think people accept that here, it is very much the culture of the organisation, there is still pockets of resistance, people are still a bit defensive, you know this is my class, I shut the door, it is nothing to do with anyone else. But we are slowly and surely breaking that down* (Participant P).

The former policy officer from the DfE, provides some insight that may help in understanding why colleges, and in particular those that manage FE colleges, drive certain behaviours:

> *No, it is the accountability framework that drives behaviour particularly for the Principals… From the Principals point of view their job, their entire career in fact needs that job, it is not just your job it is your career, is driven entirely by Ofsted frankly and so it is what Ofsted says and everything else is secondary* (Participant R).

A senior policy manager provides greater context to the strength of the accountability discourse and how it leads to an interventionist culture:

> *Ofsted look after both quality assurance and quality improvement and the DfE look after the performance measures and accountability measures so they set the structure for performance and accountability measures, don't they. And that is a big part of how the sector becomes constrained because the measures atomise things don't they. So you could argue that Ofsted overtime have become more focused on assurance rather than improvement but that is because we have got a more interventionist culture now anyway for a wide range of agencies* (Participant E).

The accountability agenda pushed by the government would appear to not only affect a teaching professional's agency in terms of greater surveillance, but also their own professional development. A principal shared the following example on the staff appraisal process:

> *…. so it is all about reflection, so it is reflection, development and accountability. And it has three stages over the year so teaching staff are asked to reflect individually on their individual class outcomes, so what's gone well and what hasn't, what you planning to put in for next year. Lesson observations what have you learned from either your formal lesson… What have you learnt from that experience what impact is that going to have on your classroom practice and then INSET so what staff development have you been on and what have you learnt* (Participant N).

Of interest firstly is the use of the language of 'accountability' alongside 'reflection'; the two in some respect are juxtaposed in as much as the former requires extrospective thinking, and the latter introspective thinking. However, the dominant position appears to be that of extrospection with the requirement to provide evidence of what went well, for the staff member to be aware and be able to verbalise tangible impact. This is likely to be evidenced by accountable outputs, such as value added scores and qualification pass rates. To qualify the position that accountability discourse appears to be driving the staff appraisal process, they had this to say about what they are ultimately accountable for:

> *Yes absolutely and clearly outputs are the things I have got my eye on because that's what the corporation hold me to account on and that is where I am wholly accountable* (Participant N).

Participants from the two FE colleges tended to reference trust and accountability more so at a micro level. Sharing examples of either why they should be trusted, or how they solicit trust in their micro relationships between individual staff and/or students. Trust, particularly in the 'open door' lesson observation example shared by the vice principal, could be argued as an act of compliance, rather than an acknowledgement of trust. The 'open door' policy as a technique reinforces the normative of surveillance, and in doing so creates an environment of what Perryman *et al*., (2018) refer to as a post-panoptic performative state. Surveillance, or more palatably put 'open door' observation, encourages stimulation of the observed to the point they

can pre-programme a response to ensure they are performative ready at any time, should they encounter an unscheduled observation.

The concerns about trust seem to be systemic in the FE sector, particularly at the meso level. What is of interest is that none of the participants explicitly stated the source proprietor of the mistrust. Nor did any of the policy actor participants articulate how they might actively counter the mistrust in their practices at both the micro and meso levels. However, there was a clear undercurrent that whomever governs the accountability measures is responsible for the mistrust.

How the accountability measures came to be normalised within the practice of the FE sector will be explored in the next sub-heading. Attention will be paid to the variant performative techniques in place to ensure accountability and compliance. Furthermore, Perryman *et al*. (2018) theory regarding post panoptic performativity will be applied in an attempt to uncover how the accountability measures, acknowledged as the source of mistrust, continue to be sustained and assimilated into practice at both the micro and meso levels of the FE sector.

## 6.3 Performative culture and post-panoptic performativity in the FE sector

There exists an extensive corpus of literature on the notion of performativity, most notably Lyotard's (1984) 'logic of performativity' and Ball's definition of performativity (Ball, 2003; 2012), which is an adaptation of Lyotard's work and is applied to the wider education context. Ball, in reference to Lyotard, describes performativity as 'a technology, a culture and a mode of regulation that employs judgements' (Ball, 2003:216). Ball goes on to say the judgements are acknowledged in the form of sanctions; most commonly the sanctions are awarded on a numerical/criteria basis through the policy technique of lesson observations. Performativity as a cultural form is explored in the literature (see Avis, 2005; Avis, 2003; Clarke, 2013; Holloway and Brass, 2018; Lucas & Crowther, 2015; O'Leary, 2013; Perryman *et al*., 2018; Simmons, 2008). The data in this research finds evidence of performative culture embedded in the policy and processes of the two colleges included in the sample population.

However, there are pockets of resistance to the dominant discourse of performativity at both the micro and meso levels of both colleges. It is important to note that although there was evidence of what Shain and Gleeson (1999) refer to as 'strategic compliance' - those [teachers & managers] who are critical of some areas of educational reform, but accepting of others - and Bathmaker (2006) termed as 'personal professionalism' - teacher focus on commitment to students and FE specialism, while retaining their own identity - there appeared to be a taken-for-granted acceptance of the regime of truth, and that performance measurement was a necessary part of the teaching and learning experience (Holloway & Brass, 2018; O'Leary, 2013; Perryman *et al*., 2018).

In order to illustrate the strength of this acceptance of performative measures, and in particular the performative technique of formal lesson observations, responses from the two colleges will be presented. The teacher with pastoral responsibility had the following to say on the micro and meso benefits of quality assurance measured by formal lesson observations:

> *… it may [lesson observations] highlight I need to do more of this or stop doing that. So on a personal level I think it can be helpful because it is checking what you are like as a teacher and how effectively you are doing your job…*
>
> *Hopefully then it should be benefitting the students because you are doing more of the engaging tasks and whatever else, which ultimately is going to help them [the students] with their results, then obviously benefits the College with better results and the department with better results. And I suppose it is in terms of checking for the College that they have over the course of whatever the time period is they have checked the quality of our teachers and, we have however many Outstanding…* (Participant K).

In addition, when they were asked what the indicators of a successful FE college are, they responded with 'objective' performative indicators determined by grades:

> *A lot of it is going to be results in terms of how many A* and pass rates did they get, obviously if they have had an Ofsted before recently… Yeah so, results, reputation of your institution* (Participant K).

What is disconcerting, but not altogether surprising, is the unquestioning acceptance of the belief that a snap shot of a single lesson could inform not only their own perception of themselves as a teacher, but could support an institutional judgement of the 'quality' of the teaching workforce of any institution. Paradoxically, they raise some concerns at the timing of the lesson observation period, as it may not provide a true depiction of their students teaching and learning experience:

> *I am still yet to do my observation which needs to be done before we break up for Easter which doesn't give us much time… so that isn't the ideal observation thing that is what the students need, so in terms of the time of year, I would say this is not a great time to come and observe me in terms of I don't want it to stop what we just need to get on with because what they need is my time with the technician running their play, with me giving them feedback. And although that would be good you know to tick some of the boxes…* (Participant K).

Although they raise concerns about the timing, they conclude with 'that would be good you know to tick some of the boxes'. This raises the question, good for whom, it is certainly not the students by the participants own admission, as much needed time would be taken away from them. Furthermore, the belief that an observation 'needs to be done' is presented as a prerequisite technique, rather than as something that is of benefit to the students.

In examples where participants were more critical of the over-emphasis on performance measures and the use of performative technology in the form of lesson observations, they still provided a formulaic tick box response when asked what they would expect to observe/deliver in a lesson observation.

*So, we have observations and I know that there are certain things that I shouldn't do as a teacher, like tell them stuff… Urrm so I know because I have had training on EQR [External Quality Review]… so I know the things that are EQR requirements. But it doesn't mean I necessarily make the effort to meet them in my own observation. Are you asking me what the requirements are? What they are looking for?...*

*So they are looking for, what they are looking for, rather than what I do. So they are looking for I know I am meant to speak to every student in the room and that annoys me immensely, I think that is a false thing. I know I have to have every student engaged and nobody off task. I know that I should have a good balance between teacher led, individual and group discussion. I know that PowerPoint with learning objectives on it… Oh and students make progress, have students made progress and being able to measure that* (Participant I, Teacher & Tutor with SpLd).

*So what I want to see in a lesson is that the students are being challenged, so I like to see in pretty much every lesson the students do an exam question, a good lesson is that you work towards an exam question, they will find that quite challenging… so I am looking for that and I am looking for that balance between teacher and student talk is quite a good indicator and I am looking to see, but I would want to see that the teacher had made some formative assessment of every student in the group in some way, so I would be looking for that. I like it very much when the students can evaluate the lesson and their own learning that is often a very good sign… that the students are engaged and involved and I know that sounds like that should be a basic thing and that is not a good lesson* (Participant C, Middle & Line Manager).

The responses above are a mixture selected from responses to either a question on the lesson observation process, or what makes an effective teacher; of interest is that the responses are

similar to the two very different questions. It is as if the discourse and techniques of performativity are so well assimilated into the everyday practices of education that those who work in the sector are unable to differentiate between the individual micro agency level of the teaching professional delivering the lesson and a technique used to measure quality.

Unlike the 'marketized teacher' documented in the research by Holloway and Brass (2018), the participants in this research did not appear in their responses to embrace 'market ethics', nor did they demonstrate behaviours in their responses that would identify them as being fully absorbed within the performative education market (Holloway & Brass, 2018: 373). However, despite expressing some frustration at the techniques they were expected to enact, their micro agency appeared to be inhibited by the expectation for them to perform to the tick box criteria. The 'gaze' of inspection (Ball 1997, cited in Perryman *et al*., 2018) appears to govern the practice of the participants, and ensures, albeit with some reluctance that they police themselves, and in doing so further embed the notion of a cult figure regarding what it is to be a teaching professional.

In addition, whenever the matter of teaching and learning arose, responses from teachers and middle managers tended to result in a very formulaic response. It was as if they were mentally ticking off a performance checklist; one that is measurable; the emphasis being on their ability to rote a process that could prove the quality of teaching and learning. O'Leary's (2013) research on performative culture and the lesson observation process found Ofsted's influence was prolific in the 10 colleges included in the sample population. O'Leary argued, in reference to Foucault, that the observation of teaching and learning is part of the 'apparatuses of control' which legitimatises forms of knowledge and will determine 'truth' and how such 'truth' becomes normalised through routines and regimes of practice (Foucault, 1980, cited in O'Leary, 2013). In addition, it is claimed by O'Leary that agents such as Ofsted 'cast a normalising gaze' over the sector; this results in Ofsted's priorities and processes being prioritised and adopted in the FE sector in the round. A middle manager acknowledges Ofsted as the 'driver' behind the

lesson observation and self-assessment review (SAR) guidance and proforma at the college where they worked:

> *I mean some of those things on that sheet are obviously driven by Ofsted, there is something on there about British values and employability skills and equality and diversity and numeracy and literacy so that is all on there, but it is very much we are told to only write under those headings if it is relevant* (Participant C).

In contrast, the participants in senior leadership positions had a more nuanced approach to crude measurements of teaching and learning in the performative technique of lesson observations:

> *So no, for me lesson observation is one element of how you make sure that our students are getting the best deal they can in the classroom. But we all know that they are you know, it is a really flawed methodology, a) because there are some people who can finesse a brilliant lesson… there are other teachers whose students get a great experience through the year but fall apart the minute anybody comes into the classroom, and so I think it is important that we do observe lessons, because they are part of a professional dialogue about enabling people to develop, and you can't enable people to develop unless you have got something concrete that you can work with* (Participant O, Principal).

> *Well the 'good' answer is someone who maximises the time and identifies the learning outcomes… urrrmm… our view is very much there is more than one way to skin a cat, you don't have to have a starter, some didactic stuff, then some group work and then a plenary, you know. Some people on some subjects can stand up for an hour and be fascinating, it is not what I would recommend normally, normally you would have a variety of activities, but it is very much you know an individual's style, teaching style is a product of their*

*own personality, so an effective teacher is aware at the end of that session that the kids have learnt something* (Participant P, Vice Principal).

*You have to get away from being a set of particular traits or personality thing to me you have to think there is room for the introvert, there is room for the extrovert, there is room for someone who does it X way and someone who does it Y way. For me you have to start with bringing about effective learning you have to maximise the learning for everyone in the room, how you get there will depend on what you are comfortable with and the techniques that you do* (Participant F, Former Principal).

However, despite the former principal providing a more enlightened view of what maximises teaching and learning in the classroom, they did acknowledge the pressure they had felt from governors during their time as a Principal. In particular, they recounted the keenness of the governors to be presented with numerical data on the percentage of teachers graded at an Ofsted rating of 2, Good or 1 Outstanding.

*… tell us we need as governors we want to know what percentage of our teachers are good or outstanding, why can't you tell me, I can tell you how many things our business produces, I can tell you what profit that we make and trying to rehearse the subtleties of education can sometimes sound a bit feeble that you are somehow keeping things from them* (Participant F).

However, they provide a conciliatory explanation for the zealous interest of governors to be presented with quality assurance data for the teaching workforce:

*If you look at their statute obligations they are ultimately responsible for the education mission and the direction of the institution, when Ofsted come and if they found that lessons were sloppy and false judgments were being made… it turned out that there was no grading or hard head performance management policy they [the governors] would get it in the neck for not having brought that about. So I suppose you could say they were taking a*

> *risk….legally they would be the people that are ultimately responsible if the college gets a grade 4. If it turns out that they let a principal bring in policies that were at odds with what was the normal accepted way of doing things* (Participant F).

The external scrutiny referred to by Poulson and the statute duty of college governors at the meso level to be ultimately responsible for the success of a college encourages a culture of surveillance (Poulson, 1999; Ranson, 2003). In a culture of surveillance, particularly in this instance where those who are ultimately responsible are not situated in the everyday practice of a FE college, proof of success becomes ever more important. In addition, Poulson (1999) goes on to argue the rights of governors and external agencies such as Ofsted has taken precedence over the rights of schools - in this instance colleges - and teaching professionals.

Furthermore, the positioning of teaching professionals as subjects was referred to by the former principal who stated:

> *… teachers largely have found some of the crude ways they have been judged and measured over the last 30 years are really difficult to come to terms with* (Participant F).

The use of the word 'judged' is an interesting one; it occurred with the word 'judgement' in a number of responses from participants from the two FE colleges, as they presented their thoughts on lesson observations and quality assurance measurement techniques.

> *I've often be asked but if you don't grade lessons how can you report on the quality of teaching and learning? I say you are not, not making judgements you are still making judgments you are just not sticking a number to them, you are still judging whether the quality of teaching and learning is good, bad or indifferent, you are still making judgments because how can you observe otherwise, it is just that they are more nuanced and there are more sensitive*

> *and they are more informed by everything else that has an impact on teaching and learning* (Participant O, Principal).

The principal makes an interesting observation about the strength of the performative discourse and techniques around measurement. It is almost as if there is some comfort in the numerical figure: if success is quantifiable it can be proven. In addition, despite Ofsted ceasing individual lesson grading in the academic year 2014/2015, Ofsted still grade the institution and individual lessons will be expected to meet the criteria for good or better if the institution hopes to achieve a grade 1. Outstanding, or 2. Good, in the following areas: quality of education, personal development, and behaviour and attitudes (Ofsted, 2019).

Another principal, states they no longer grade lessons, however what is clear in the descriptor of how a 'judgment' is made is Ofsted's prevailing 'gaze' and the governmentality of the inspection in the standard measurement set at either 'good' or 'better'.

> *To answer your direct question on lesson observations, we don't grade, we haven't done for some time, but clearly there are judgments that are being made on certain guidance criteria, which is something you would expect to see from a decent lesson. The only kind of assessment that we make is has the lesson met the required standard which is essentially good or better…* (Participant N).

In addition, a middle manager at the same college, clarifies the college's position in terms of the minimum requirement of a grade 2.

> *What we do is we are looking for a lesson to be a minimum of a 2, it has to be good or better. So when we don't grade we still recognise and consider if the lesson is good or better, if it isn't then you are flagging it up that there is need for improvement here…*
>
> *I think the trouble is in teaching, the odd thing, that even though you are part of a team, you do your job in isolation and you are judged in isolation, look at your results compared to the rest of the team. Look at your departments*

*results in comparison to the rest of the colleges results, so I think for that reason people can feel vulnerable and exposed and the irony here is that you want people not to feel like that…* (Participant H).

If comparisons between institutions in terms of accountability measures is problematic, what then of the measures themselves. Participants, in particular those from the FE sector organisations, agencies and departments, questioned the policy of measurement raising some pertinent questions as to the purpose and approach to measurement, and the philosophy behind the practice of measurement.

The FE and HE consultant raises an important point about measurement, the measurement is what becomes important, and it is what drives behaviour:

*The performance measures that are put in place by the department, the requirements of Ofsted push behaviour, they make them behave in certain ways to chase what is defined as being important. And what's important is that which is measured, yeah when in fact we might be measuring stuff that is completely irrelevant, we don't know, that is what we measure, so that is what we put are efforts into* (Participant M).

The purpose of measuring prompted quite a vexed response from a number of participants. However, a senior policy manager is very clear in their support for performance measures and how they can be used to determine a 'good' teacher.

*... if you don't deal with the individual performance of a teacher that student is not going to get to where they need to be and that student is being let down… but I mean… and you have to measure… and how do you measure that? And I understand this completely that sometimes it is difficult to look at exam results if you in a sixth form college, that can feel like quite sort of narrow, utilitarian, how do you capture things like enjoyment and all that kind of stuff, but ultimately you do have to have some hard measures and that is*

> *why we developed [names document] report which covers not just value added but it is an extended value added system which covers things like attendance and high grades, retention and achievement and all these different things, so you get a very broad basket of indicators at teacher level… I don't think it is unreasonable to say that if you look at where you are amongst your peers in this college but also amongst your peers in the whole sector the results your students are getting is not there, those young people are not getting the results they would of got if they were with another teacher* (Participant Q).

Of interest is the notion that teachers are what Reay (2006) refers to as the 'magic bullet', they can address the imbalances that may prevent a student from underachieving (Reay, 2006, cited in Edington, 2016:307). The senior policy manager champions and advocates the techniques of Value Added measures. Value Added measures themselves have been argued as problematic; firstly because there is more than one type of value added model of measurement, and so comparisons may be skewed if the same things are not measured but still compared. Secondly, Value Added measures are school and teacher focused and compare a student's academic performance over time. However, because they do not take into account the contextual matter of, for instance the type of institution a student came from: is the institution, 'inclusive' or 'exclusive', they have been argued as biased (see Perry, 2016; Taylor and Nguyan, 2006; Van der Wateren & Amerin-Beardsley, cited in Evers & Kneyber, 2016). In addition, value added scores support a reductionist view of educational success; the intent still appears to be on proving performance through quantitative measures of retention, destination, achievement, attendance, high grades etc. However, they go on to raise a pertinent question around what do we do now if we do not measure:

> *If there is no measurement of this what would you do? Are we talking about… I don't think anyone is talking about no measurement at all… I don't think… but if you are not talking about no measurement at all then we are talking about measurement, so the question becomes what is that measurement?* (Participant Q).

The response requires some careful consideration; it implies we may have come too far down the performative road to change lanes, or indeed consider an alternative discourse other than the performative one that advocates the use of crude measurements to determine quality. It could be argued the position expressed extends the reach of post-panoptic performativity to include FE sector organisations, agencies and departments (Perryman *et al*., 2018). The stimulant of the performative Value Added measure is accepted as the norm and therefore the true reading of a teacher's success. This in turn stimulates FE sector organisations to create and implement new reporting mechanisms, which support the reading of the regime of truth and so further embed performative compliance.

Encouragingly, there appears to be an appetite for change from participants illustrated in the extracts below. However, apart from one of the principals stating performance measures need to be more nuanced and sensitive, no alternative form of gauging the quality of teaching and learning other than measurement was discussed or suggested. In its place appears to be an assertive 'real life' belief that education is merely an instrumental process. To begin, one of the senior policy managers makes some correlation between the performative measures of educational successes and an education system that is student-centric. Similarly, Holloway and Brass (2018) found a conflation between the market values of measurement and the wellbeing of students, with their teacher sample of participants describing their role as a producer of products and citing the techniques of measurement as not always accurate, but necessary to ensure good student outputs (See: Holloway & Brass, 2018: 373-374).

> *But I think you have to look… and we are in the resource business I mean that is a reality for a student you know, are we doing well by a student who says well I went to college and I had a fantastic time, didn't get any qualifications but I had a brilliant time… that is just not real life is it, it is about the student going in most of the time to get a qualification to progress to work or higher education. Now if they don't get that then they would be let down, so I think ultimately it is student-centric how do we get the best for our students and get them to where they need to be* (Participant Q).

A response by one of the principals is more reflective, and implies that performative discourse is so embedded in the policies and practices in schools and colleges that the students themselves approach education in an 'instrumental' way.

> *… but the problem is if you ask your average 17 year old, would you rather have a really kind of comprehensive and rounded education experience where you are challenged, asked to think independently, made uncomfortable, not spoon fed, not hand held etc. Or would you rather get three A's and they will say, I will have the three A's please. Education has become very instrumental… And I think you know, more and more we treat students as clients and education as a business, the more we will end up with that very instrumental, pragmatic view of education* (Participant O).

The 'instrumental' view of education is something that is also raised by the vice principal, however their account applied to the teaching professionals themselves, and a preoccupation with the numeric grade following a lesson observation.

> *I worked at [names college] before here and whether or not someone got their performance…there is a performance remunerated element of their pay there, their PSP and the only way you would get there is if you got a 2 in their lesson observation, so as soon as you said it was a 2 they couldn't care less what else you said* (Participant P).

There is an interesting distinction made here, as they refer to one of the more perverse techniques of performative culture, performance related pay (PRP). Neither college in the sample population had adopted the technique, however there are schools and colleges that have. Marsden in 2009 argued that there is overwhelming evidence to suggest that paradoxically PRP has the converse effect and actually results in demotivating professionals; it does not result in the desired effect of improving student outputs (Marsden, 2009). In addition, the notion of PRP for public sector professionals could be argued as devaluing and debasing the profession, as it does not appreciate the value of the professional's skill and work ethic - something that was identified as important in Bathmaker's (2006) 'personal professionalism'. In support of the discourse of 'personal professionalism' a former senior policy manager describes

a teaching professional that is less concerned with the performative rewards of numerical grades.

> *In my exposure to those that are actually teaching I would of never of thought their primary thought when they pull up in the car park in the morning, oh I am really pleased to be working for a grade 1 college, or a grade 2 college. Or I am really sad that I work for a grade 4 college. I don't think that would have been at the forefront of their mind, because I think… and maybe I am not a teacher so I don't know, but they don't care about that wider infrastructure of the building, they focus on their classroom and the people that they are supporting, engaging on a day to day, year to year basis…* (Participant G).

The sentiment expressed is echoed by teachers and managers from the two FE colleges. Some frustration is expressed at the performative regimes which have entered pedagogic practice and classroom initiatives. A teacher and tutor shares an example of where they believe the necessity to prove something had outweighed what was actually best for both staff and students.

> *So we used to do these skills clinics which were these massive clinics that we set up out of a progressive review and we would set them as a target for students to go to, three of us in the department felt they were only there so we could meet the EQR requirements, so we could say here's a target, we've set it, we've taught this massive session that no one enjoyed, no one got anything out of it… so we made a move to say we didn't want to do them anymore and introduced what we felt was more constructive past paper club, so we did actually change that. But it was very clear that my [line manager] wanted that, but what am I going to put on the EQR, how can I prove we have made progress, how can I prove that we have targeted these students and done this, but it was kind of falling on deaf ears that the students were not finding them helpful, nor were we finding them helpful, so that was very*

> *much meeting the College requirements rather than what we felt was better for the students* (Participant I).

The ability for a teacher to prove their contribution to the teaching and learning experience was also referred to by one of the principals in their description of the over reliance of some staff on the use of teaching props, such as subject booklets

> *… as if somehow handing over this beautiful document meant they knew it and they understood it or they could do anything with it. But then again the thing about… it is scary to not teach the content, because teaching the content is tick, tick, tick, done that. Whereas actually teaching students the skills they need so as a sociology student they are able to think critically, be able to evaluate, to be able to analyse, if you can do all those things it doesn't matter if that study was taught to me in the classroom, because I know what to do with that study because I have got all the skills* (Participant O).

The takeaway point being made here is the perversity of performative culture in reducing the teaching and learning experience to a series of techniques that can be counted and evidenced. The use of the word 'scary' is of particular interest; are teachers scared or could it be the skills described are more difficult to evidence in a quantitative way. The skills of analysis and evaluation are sophisticated qualitative skills and it would be much harder, if at all possible, to evidence these in a formal lesson observation. How might a teacher then prove their teaching is 'good or better'? They cannot, but they can if they adopt performative techniques such as: producing booklets, adopting the latest questioning techniques, setting summative assessments in every lesson, ensuring they tick off, when necessary, numeracy, literacy, British values, Prevent, or whatever government mandatory requirement is put in place at the time.

It is not surprising that the emphasis is on the ability to prove if we consider the government's accountability measures, and the expectation that Ofsted will inspect to ensure the accountability measures are met. Christine Gilbert, a former Head of Ofsted, in 2012 produced a report on behalf of the National College for Teaching and Leadership (NCTL) sponsored by

the DfE (NCTL, 2012). The report outlined two key approaches to the notion of collective accountability amongst teachers. The summative model concerned itself with outputs and was referred to as the performance/productivity model, the key intention was to prove quality. The second model referred to as an improvement/process model was described as a formative model and concerned itself with improving quality. It could be argued that practice within the classroom resembles more of a summative model than a formative, and this goes some way to explain why teachers are preoccupied with the notion of proving over improving. At the very least, teachers experience what Stoten (2013) refers to as 'values schizophrenia', as they try to reconcile their own personal view of professionalism with the need to confirm to the prevailing preoccupation with performative techniques and regimes (Stoten, 2013:367-368).

Both the existing literature and the accounts of the participants draw attention to the tensions and paradoxes that exist in an FE sector driven by external scrutiny, shaped by performative discourse and techniques. The question of whom is the main beneficiary of performance measures was asked of 12 out of the 15 participants. Only two explicitly referred to students being the main beneficiary, with a further three stating students would be argued as the main beneficiary by agents such as Ofsted. The remaining six offered a range of responses including the government, parents, Ofsted, SLT and middle managers. What is disconcerting, considering that accountability measures have existed for some time now, is that there exists a lack of consensus from the participants on the purpose of the measures.

The government accountability rhetoric would propose that students are the main beneficiaries of the measures, however the participants in this research were unable to collectively identify the student as the main beneficiary. In reference to the literature, and the findings in this research, it could be argued that the main beneficiaries are the external agencies, who are charged with scrutinising the FE sector (see Englund & Gerdin, 2019; Holloway & Brass, 2018; Perryman *et al*., 2018). In addition, teaching professionals appear to be placed as ultimately accountable for student success in the form of high achieving outputs.

In the above extracts and exploration, governmentality in the form of panoptic performativity is evident not just within the FE colleges, but throughout FE sector organisations, agencies and departments. The gaze of inspection and Value Added measures appear to be guiding and stimulating practice, albeit with the caveat of recognising that a one size model of performing and measuring has its restrictions, and the benefits for students development is unclear.

The next sub-heading will develop and explore further performative techniques and the forms in which they are presented. Performative techniques are generally presented in two streams; the first is concerned with numerical accountability measures in the form of grades and scores. The second is presented as a more palatable process of techniques concerned with improvement, normally demonstrated in the guise of continued professional development (CPD). The next sub-heading concerns itself with whether they are indeed two distinct streams, or are they in fact two sides of the same performative coin.

## 6.4 Prove or improve – two sides of the same coin

During the data analysis there emerged a theme on the FE sectors preoccupation to prove rather than 'improve' the quality of education taught in the sector. However, it could be argued they are both sides of the same performative coin. Often, in the examples shared by participants, particularly around CPD, the key driver for the training was on getting staff to a 'normative' Ofsted standard of 'good' or better. Throughout the interviews participants regularly provided examples of what they perceived to be concerned with improving both the student journey in terms of outcomes, as well as the more performative outputs of high Value Added and results scores. Participants were asked questions about the benefits of performative practices, or in some instances they were asked whom the main beneficiaries of performance measures were. Albeit there was no consistent beneficiary identified by the participants, what did persist, especially amongst the participants from the two colleges, was a belief that the steps they had taken to implement government policy appreciated the need to improve the outcomes of each student's learner journey, as well as to deliver the desired outputs.

There is evidence in the data from both colleges that the main objective is to improve both the student and staff experience. With particular attention paid to personal/character development for students and professional development for staff, the language of 'developmental' and 'outcomes' were used to present a more holistic approach to teaching and learning, where the emphasis was on improving. The opportunities for identifying developmental needs for individual teachers appeared to be during formal or informal lesson observations, during the appraisal process, in the writing of the department self-assessment report (SAR), and on examining the achievement data by individual teacher.

A vice principal had this to say about the lesson observation process, and the departmental self-assessment report:

> *When we self-assess as an organisation we don't use the Ofsted criteria.* [refers to previous Principal] *devised the ten key features of what is a good provider… so yeah and then we have a mid-year position statement… at the end of year they will write a full self-assessment report against each of the ten key features evidenced. Write an action plan on what they are going to do this year, reflect on last year's action plan to what extent changes have or not been made, there will be a panel with all of SLT and the manager we interrogate the SAR look at the data for the year, what went well and want went less well… So in terms of to what extent do things like the 10 key features impact on teaching and learning that is the process that we use* (Participant P).

They go on to explain the teaching staff appraisal process, which they argue is 'a bit different from most places'.

> *… our appraisal is a bit different from most places, it is very much a conversation, it is very much about what can we do to improve what you do, not why haven't you done this. We set targets but the targets tend to be developmental, they wouldn't be about increasing the number of A grades in your class, they would be about attending a course on stretch and challenge,*

*or observing someone teacher because they are very good at that, or do some training on group work* (Participant P).

The distinction between quantitative and qualitative development is an interesting one. The description in the qualitative examples provided appear to be rooted in the desire to improve practice rather than just prove it. The vice principal elaborates further by providing an example which recognises that teachers are not homogenous; individual differences would be considered as part of the appraisal process - in this instance teachers diagnosed with a SpLD are referred to:

*It would come out of the lesson observation, come out of conversations partly informed by results but you wouldn't have a crude target like that. So in terms of if someone declared a learning difference then you take that into account when you are thinking about what steps you wanted someone to take to improve how they work when they are in their classroom, that would be part of the conversation if someone declared* (Participant P).

However, they did acknowledge student and staff development could not be at the expense of outputs in the form of achievement. Notwithstanding, they believed development of outcomes and focus on improving teaching and learning would result in the desired outputs.

*When we are doing a lesson observation what learning outcome do we want to see take place, is that 70 minutes being maximised as effectively as possible…That is not to say that if everyone got straight U's we wouldn't be worried…*

*… students are more likely to stay and achieve well in a college in which they are well taught to be blunt… if you have got good teaching and learning taking place students are more likely to be engaged be involved, interested, therefore they will stay, they will attend, be on time and they will get good results at the end of the day. That is not to say we don't have our performance measures - we use ALPS, we have monitoring in year, four times a year, staff do predicted grades on their students* (Participant P).

Although the recounting of the policies put in place to encourage development and to improve student and staff outcomes appear on the surface to challenge performative discourse, when asked about the benefits of performance measures the response is preoccupied with scrutinising individual teacher outputs.

> *We will interrogate the final results by teacher, we will know which members of staff have got poor results, both in absolute and in value added terms, we will know that. That is a tool for us then to go and work with that member of staff and say why do you think this was the case? Do you need some help with stretch and challenge? Whatever it is, so our view is that performance measures is an indicator to us that there is a developmental need in a member of staff, then it is down to the manager to put a programme together that meets that need* (Participant P).

What is disconcerting is the supposition in the wording of the response that if a teacher is unable to prove their capability in the form of quantitative outputs, it will be assumed their skills as a teacher require improving. No other explanation is offered other than this deficiency theory. Such a position supports a regime of truth that teachers are ultimately accountable for the success of their students and any deficiency is not due to the ills of measurement, but due to an ineffectual member of the teaching workforce (O'Leary 2013; Whitehead 2005).

One of the ways in which colleges believe they can develop the skills of their workforce is to invest in CPD. The matter of CPD was raised by participants, with some nuanced and interesting insights. A middle manager who has responsibility for organising CPD, explained how the CPD process is organised at their present employment. They open with an observation comparing the compulsory and non-compulsory sector, believing that for the former a certain number of CPD hours is mandatory. Interestingly, they also note that other FE institutions adopt the technique of recording the number of CPD hour's staff complete; this is likely to be a hangover from the mandatory 30 hour CPD requirements, overseen by the Institute for Learning (IfL) between 2007-2012. Of interest is the argument put forth by Orr (2009) that paradoxically mandatory CPD did little to influence the practice of teachers.

> *… it makes me aware that other schools and colleges are keeping a record, but here it would just be so long as people turn up for the INSET days… we do have a system in the professional review where people would put up areas they need to develop and request if they needed training and then that would be given a priority, then if they wanted money to be able to do the training, if it had been on their request, then it would have a higher priority. But you know I think here it is very free and easy you know…* (Participant C).

In addition, they refer to the teaching standards developed by the Education and Training Foundation (ETF) in 2014, and shares a particular concern that 'people in this College are not aware of the teaching standards'. It is a safe assumption that by 'people' they are referring to the teaching and possibly management workforce. The crux of the concern appears to be around the Professional Standards category - Professional Knowledge & Understanding, point 8, to 'maintain and update your knowledge of educational research to develop evidence-based research'. However, what is not clear in the account, or in the ETF Professional Standards, are, suggestions on how colleges may exercise agency in how they interpret and enact evidenced based research. In the absence of approaching Point 8 of the ETF framework in a holistic and interpretative way, it is likely the exercise will become another performative tick-box exercise (ETF, 2018).

> *A question that I took to a recent [group of colleges committee] meeting is, do any other colleges have a stipulation that staff have to be involved in research, education research, because I think one of the teaching standards, that is something I look at from time to time, and again I think that is something that… I always say to [names senior staff member] and [names senior staff member] people in this College are not aware of the teaching standards… what are people doing as far as research goes, the reason I talked about teaching standards is that you can interpret some of that as we should be involved in some educational research and it turned out that all the other [group of colleges committee] do have some requirement, some of them talk about being still engaged with research, which means you can read someone else's research and bring it along and share it, and I feel you*

> *know we are meant to be a grade 1 college we ought to be doing that, then actually, you know I suggested that to the [names senior manager] and it has pretty much gone down like a lead balloon…* (Participant C).

Of interest is the assertion that as a Grade 1 Outstanding College the workforce should be engaging with research. Their suggestion makes a direct link between qualitative research discussion/practice groups, and a drive to improve staff knowledge on the substantive matters explored in educational research. However, the reality of professional development via CPD appears to be stunted, as the middle manager and other participants in this research claim CPD is centred on inspection frameworks and lacks the foresight to monitor how CPD might present tangible improvements for teaching and learning practice.

> *I think the framework that is used for Ofsted would guide what we do very much through the [names senior role] so it wouldn't be that I would be keeping an eye on the changing emphasis on that, but she would be feeding that through and when she is considering the INSET programme she would have that framework very much in mind… having to set something on the quality review for assessment would have been because she would've seen that as an Ofsted important topic and then we would have the EQR and now it will trickle down and now we are going to have some INSET on it* (Participant C).

The former policy officer states that although there is a recognition in the sector of the value of CPD to improve teaching and learning standards, CPD often requires teaching staff to be released from teaching duties to attend development sessions. Furthermore, they argue the focus by agencies such as Ofsted on outputs that can be proven, impacts on whether SLT push CPD that concerns itself with professional development with the purpose of improving professional knowledge.

> *I didn't get the feeling that people approached CPD with that sort of rigorous methodology, they might say this is what we need… what they wouldn't necessarily do is then evaluate that and say so having done this has this*

> *addressed the issue we identified from the data as in you know pupils are not progressing adequately in these particular groups…*
>
> *So I don't think the evaluation side of things… they could recognise CPD as a valuable currency per se, you know CPD is good and if we could do more CPD then great, but then they have all of these other external pressures on them which are limiting the accessibility of CPD… what they are being held to account on is not how much CPD have you enabled and evaluated and shown to be effective. It is not as if Ofsted say I need to see data that show that you have done CPD and shown it to be effective* (Participant R).

The middle manager with CPD responsibility goes on to state that one of the barriers for teaching staff is the time spent attending training; they reflect on what techniques are particularly useful for students and how such reflection could inform planning.

> *I mean actually just the time to do more training more networking, people doing their own syllabus and that is fairly minimal and that is because of the pressures just feeling you can't go out of College. It would be great if we could meet more often with people doing the same syllabus. And I think maybe that kind of thing puts everything else in the shade as far as barriers, you see if we had more time we would do more checking on how useful the students found the lesson, how much they think they learned then use that to inform our planning* (Participant C).

A report published by the DfE in 2018 on teaching, leadership and governance in FE found the experiences recounted by the two participants above were not uncommon. The report supports the supposition that senior leaders in FE do not encourage sufficient focus on CPD. Furthermore, access to CPD was made difficult due to a number of variables, including time, the lack of collaborative networks, and the sessional nature of the FE sector in GFEC (Government Social Research, 2018).

However, there are examples in the research data of senior leaders taking an active role in the promotion and organisation of CPD, with the focus on improving teaching and learning practice and running CPD sessions during periods when teachers maybe more likely to put the development into practice.

> *The development of our staff is one of our main priorities. In the last couple of years we have put in more time and money…every half term we shut for an afternoon and just have managers working with their staff, doing some CPD, getting someone in, or doing it themselves. Yeah it is something you do in July when someone is knackered they have forgotten it by August, so we try and do stuff in year… so we can do some CPD work with staff at the start of the year when they are about to go into classroom when they are more likely to use it as it is less pressure, as opposed to doing it at the end when they have got six weeks to forget it* (Participant P, Vice Principal).

However, the drive to improve teachers' professional knowledge and skills appeared to be - in the accounts provided by SLT members - triggered by underperformance and measured by the outputs of individual teachers, not from the position of innovating and developing teachers who are already performing to the desired standard.

> *One thing I would say and this is where the outputs do have an impact because we have to do that, every year as soon as the results come out senior team will analyse, where there are quite clear indicators of underperformance we will work with, and by 'we' I mean one member of the senior leadership team, and a divisional director, head of department with a plan for improvement. The first meeting that we have of that nature emphasises that this is a supportive process and it has an impact… If you look at the outcomes the following, outputs the following year… there is virtually always improvement* (Participant N, Principal).

Another principal states:

> *The tension I think comes with the interface between a kind of developmental approach and a quality assurance approach when you've got*

> *underperformance. Because it is fine... you are never a complete teacher, we all develop… That is fine while everybody is over that threshold of being a competent teacher and we are just refining, refining our practice, the issue is when you get somebody who is not meeting that threshold and we have had that experience here… they need a structure to the development that you are trying to enable them to progress through, otherwise it is scattergun, try this, try this, try this, which they try. A lot of people are not meeting that threshold not because they are refusing to but because they have not got the capacity to do that, it is often not a lack of willingness but a lack of ability* (Participant O).

Again, albeit the reflection by the principal appears to be appreciating some of the nuances of the balancing act between a developmental and quality assurance approach to performance, the assumption still persists that it is the teacher who is deficient, evidenced in their inability to prove their worth in delivering the desired threshold. This is likely to be assumed to translate to the desired outputs.

In this sub-heading participants have differentiated between what they perceive to be measures of proof and the techniques employed to develop quality improvement. One of the techniques for improvement most cited by participants is professional CPD. CPD is positioned as the perfect conduit for improving and developing both professional practice, and performative outputs. However, the preoccupation remained on meeting quality assurance standards. Therefore, this thesis argues CPD is reformulated into a performative technique, one which morphs both prove and improve into the same thing, and upholds the performative status quo.

The next sub-heading will return the focus to the expectations of accountability; presenting the development of techniques in place at the micro and meso college level to support staff in managing the expected norms of the inspection framework. Concerns are raised by participants at the lack of 'real' support available at both the micro and meso levels to address any underperformance. Notwithstanding, accounts of underperformance by participants still appear

to be preoccupied with the micro level of teacher. Furthermore, there is an undercurrent of presenting the teaching workforce as a homogenous whole.

## 6.5 Performative discourse and accountability

Participants raised concerns around the notion of proving and improving standards. In particular, the former principal raises some pertinent points around the notion of supporting teachers to improve if they fall short of delivering the expected outputs. Of interest, they make a distinction between different types of teaching organisation in their reference to working in an Academy. The implication in the observation is that it will be the culture of the organisation and the discourse that drives the norms and values which will determine the worth of an individual teacher or manager.

> *If I suddenly found myself working in an Academy where there were very prescribed ways of doing things, I would probably be described as bloody useless, and even those Academies there might be people telling you to do it this way or that way and so there might be a degree of support there but that is not the same as a more enlighten way of saying as long as you get to X we are not so worried about how you arrive at it* (Participant F).

They go on to draw attention to the discourse that drives the 'support'; again the implication is the steps to improve professional development are rooted in performative discourse and influenced at the meso level by agencies such as Ofsted, with the sole intention of getting teachers to a level where they can prove their ability in lesson observation outputs.

> *So there might be some forms of support and people telling you what you should be doing but what I am saying is that somewhere that is wrongheaded in terms of the advice that you might get, some places you might be judged without a lot of explanation of what you are being judged on. But I think most colleges because of the Ofsted regimes probably got some semblance of the system of what they are going to expect to see when they go in a lesson, so if that is support then there is a degree of that, but all too often the consequence of teaching a bad lesson is to be re-observed and*

> *if you get another grade three you are in competence procedures, very rarely is it genuinely supportive* (Participant F).

In addition, the former senior policy manager claimed the current preoccupation with quality assurance as determined by outputs stagnated innovation.

> *I think that where leaders feel that they got an invested interest in the success and a long term viability of their business they are more likely to take risk to learn and take the opportunities that are presented. If you have got leaders in organisations that very much think about the year to year, that is what they will focus on, as safe environment and that safe environment is not necessarily progress and is just sustaining being adequate rather than striving to be the best… People work to the glass ceiling of what they are banded at and wait to be told by their management teams or by their superiors on what to do next or what to do in certain circumstances. And I think when we continue to drive those sort of behaviours or engrain those sort of behaviours in organisations institutionally those organisations will never be high performing organisations because they are not responsive, not agile enough to face them* (Participant G).

Both the former senior policy manager and the FE and HE consultant raise concerns about the sort of professional and organisational behaviours quality assurance measures purport by agencies, such as Ofsted. The FE and HE consultant in particular argued that Her Majesty's Inspectorate (HMI), which held responsibility for inspecting education from 1839-1992, provided a post inspection development role unlike the current inspection service provided by Ofsted.

> *The other one was around HMI Her Majesties Inspectorate… were just not concerned with inspection they also had the notion of a role in development and I think… that's been a lost, so okay if I am out there inspecting actually I will be taking some lessons from this and then supporting the development and part of my job as an HMI should be working with organisations and colleges, and we seemed to have separated those things out and therefore*

*the inspection regimes feels I am sure nowadays as much more rigid and judgemental then it probably did in the olden days* (Participant M, FE & HE Consultant).

Furthermore, they recounted additional support from local authority inspections with the purpose of facilitating support and developmental change:

*We also had local authority inspections and those inspectors again their role was research development and inspection so they worked with people to support improvement to support development change, rather than just be we are in here inspecting. I don't know, I know there are stretch and challenge coordinators that come in and support those that are deemed to be requiring improvement, but I don't think it is the same as it was* (Participant M).

The former senior policy manager stated:

*… if Ofsted want to make a contribution to the sector coming in and telling them they are crap is not contributing to the effectiveness of that sector or that body, coming in and saying this isn't where we expect the standard to be, this is how we are going to help and support you to get to where you need to be* (Participant G).

The notion that a quality assurance process which encourages a preoccupation with proving quality could lead to mediocracy was also commented on by the FE and HE consultant:

*But there are some that get themselves into that outstanding and then all they do is try and reinforce being outstanding and if you have a look at the number of colleges… this is the first time I have thought of this… those organisations that are just into outstanding as they reinforce what they think is outstanding behaviours they lose that innovation, they lose that trust, and therefore they dropped back into requires improvement* (Participant M).

Interestingly, one of the senior policy managers, when asked whether they believed the preoccupation with proving performance may lead to a safe mediocrity sector, responded with a perplexing account of why they believed it not to be a concern.

> *I don't think Ofsted are that interested in it. I think Ofsted really just want to know really are your performance management systems robust are they good, they won't go into detail in an individual inspection about how a college is doing it…* (Participant Q).

The above statement is somewhat at odds with the Ofsted purpose stated in the Grade 1 Outstanding Criteria for the category of Leadership and Management, updated in the 'Ofsted Further Education Skills Handbook' (Ofsted, 2019). The criteria states, 'Leaders ensure that teachers receive focused and highly effective professional development… pedagogical content knowledge builds and develops consistently over time and *improves* [my emphasis] the quality of education' (Ofsted, 2019: 60). Therefore, the opportunity to improve should be a requisite for every teacher and should not be resigned to meeting a threshold, nor indeed simply to maintain one. However, at this juncture it would be helpful to remind the reader of the recommended expectations of the ETF Teaching and Learning Standards, Professional Knowledge & Understanding, point 8, to maintain a knowledge of educational research and to engage in research where possible. Both the Ofsted criteria for 2019 and the ETF standards are not entirely juxtaposed. However, it is clear in the responses from participants in this research that the improvements in teaching and learning practice are perceived as relegated to quality assurance over quality improvement, even more perversely as raised above, is the conflation between the two, leading to them being two sides of the same coin.

Notwithstanding, the data presented so far details a preoccupation with improving teaching and learning through the use of a series of techniques, including CPD, in order to satisfy quantitative thresholds of performance. However, there are examples provided by the participants which demonstrate a desire to approach improving practice in a more holistic way. A principal and vice principal describe a residency model that moves beyond the single lesson observation snapshot.

*Last year I did residencies, so I spent a week in every department that I line managed so that was all the curriculum areas, and I did a mixture of announced and unannounced observations, learning walks, I did student feedback groups, etc. etc. So I was trying to have a comprehensive overview or a snapshot of teaching and learning in that area. And then [names senior member of staff] this year has done a sort of follow up mini residency, where he has picked up on some of things that came out of my report, and then focused on those and anything else of interest to those departments and I think that is quite a good model because it allow you to see teaching and learning in the round* (Participant O).

*In order to get to know the College a lot better I have sort of had what you would call residencies, I have plonked myself for a week in a programme area and seen every teacher teach, not for the whole lesson, some of them for the whole lessons, but at least half an hour for each member of staff. I had a focus group with students been through some assessed work, been to their programme meeting that week and then ask the manager to leave for 15 minutes so they could share with me what their real concerns are and met with the manager as well* (Participant P).

Albeit, a key part of the residency model is to observe lessons the emersion of senior management at the micro department level demonstrates a willingness to understand the context in which teachers, management and students operate. The model appears to be more inclusive than the traditional summative Ofsted model of lesson observation. In conjunction with the lesson observations and meetings with teaching teams, managers and student feedback groups were exercised.

However, as the model had only run for one year, neither participant was able to comment on whether the model directly contributed to improving the teaching and learning experience for both staff and students. However, what is reassuring and the key take away point, is that the

college chose not to, as the former senior policy manager (Participant G) had observed earlier 'play it safe', they chose instead to innovate and explore the notion of quality improvement in a holistic way. However, It would be disingenuous not to acknowledge that currently the college where both the principal and vice principal referred to above reside, is not a Grade 1 Outstanding college, and as the FE and HE consultant observed earlier, once colleges hit the Grade 1 threshold they may be inclined to protect the grade by shifting to a focus concerned with quality assurance, and thus become preoccupied with proving quality.

## 6.6 Summary

To summarise Chapter 6. Participants responses frequently conflated quality assurance and quality improvement, or to put it simply, the notion to prove or improve. Often participants used numerical measures such as Ofsted grades and Value Added scores to signify indicators of improvement, when in practice they were little more than techniques used to look at quality in a reductive way. The irony is that the performative techniques put in place to measure improvement do no more than prove improvement as determined by quantitative measures. When participants were asked about the lesson observation process they provided a rote answer of what they were expected to include in a lesson observation: evidence of assessment for learning, Prevent strategy, numeracy and literacy. The participants response to the question on lesson observations gives prominence to the disconnect between the performative discourse that lesson observations lead to 'improvement' and the reality of lesson observation tick list as a way to 'prove' compliance to quality assurance measures (Englund & Gerdin, 2019). The disconnect is summed up in the following sentence from a teacher participant (Participant I): 'So I know the things that are EQR [External Quality Review] requirements… what they are looking for, rather than what I do'.

Furthermore, initiatives designed to develop and improve teacher knowledge and skills in the form of CPD were little more than techniques to maintain the governmentality of the Ofsted inspection. One of the senior policy managers (Participant Q), advocates comparisons of individual teacher results, believing the technique of outing individual teacher underperformance

will address underachievement and go some way to improving individual student outcomes. Similarly, the vice principal, exercises the technique of interrogating the results by teacher, albeit they present the technique as a tool for identifying a developmental need, the proposition is still the same: the responsibility of failure and/or achievement is very much situated at the micro level of individual teachers.

In addition, participants appeared to accept the regime of truth, in the form of the normalising gaze of measurement techniques, and comparisons. What is interesting in the descriptions from participants on how trust is earned and maintained is the implicit presence of compliance. This thesis argues the notion of trust is reformulated into a policy technique, the sole purpose of which is to further normalise the performative practice of lesson observations and the surveillance of teachers. The vice principal illustrates the technique in their description of an 'open door' policy of lesson observations, albeit it is presented as a trust building exercise, what is not clear is the benefit of the technique. A number of participants draw attention to macro influences in relation to trust, most notably the government's preoccupation with accountability, measured by a performative accountability framework. Participants present trust as a systemic problem within the English education system where the purpose of the techniques of measurement are in place to accommodate the measures, rather than the measures in place to accommodate the education system. Like the 'open door' lesson observation policy, the accountability measures are techniques of surveillance, and in consideration of the points above regarding 'inclusive' and 'exclusive' colleges it is unclear what the actual tangible benefits to students are, or for those who teach and manage in the FE sector.

In short, there appears to be a losing of the way regarding what it means to improve both for staff and for students. Initiatives introduced under the guise of 'improvement' missed the mark in terms of them resulting in tangible 'improvements' for those they were intended for.

In the next chapter (Chapter 7) the central tenet is to explore the notion of a homogenous workforce in the FE sector. The accountability framework and performative techniques documented in this thesis combine to present a 'one size fits all' position of a teaching professional. The participants were very clear in their positioning of what a teaching professional should be able to do. The next chapter explores the origins of the ideal teaching professional purported by the participants, and uncovers the number of resilience strategies exercised in the pursuit of performing to the ideal. Furthermore, through the accounts by the two teachers with SpLDs the tensions and contradictions of the ideal figure become more exposed and a cult figure starts to emerge.

# Chapter 7: Cult of the Performative Teacher

## 7.1 Introduction

The notion of teachers as a professional group is a nuanced and vexed debate. In the corpus of literature attention is first paid to defining the term professional and then to applying the working definition(s) of the term professional to the role of teacher. Hoyle and Wallace (2005) explore the changing concepts of professionalism, and identifies key elements of what determines a professional; that of autonomy and control. The debate regarding defining teaching as a profession is explored further in the literature review chapter of this thesis, and in the corpus of literature (see Bathmaker & Avis, 2013; Holloway & Brass, 2018; Hoyle & Wallace, 2005; Perryman *et al*., 2018; Spenceley 2006; Stoten, 2013; Robson, *et al*., 2004). In addition, existing literature identifies, compares and contrasts discourses of teacher professionalism (see Bathmaker & Avis, 2013; Englund & Gerdin, 2019; Holloway & Brass, 2018; Lucas & Crowther, 2016; Plowright & Barr, 2012; Robson & Bailey, 2009; Robson, *et al*., 2004; Shain & Gleeson, 1999; Simmons & Thompson, 2007). Albeit, the literature tends to approach the notion of the teaching professional from the perspective of teachers who have entered the FE sector as skilled vocational practitioners, the discourses of professionalism, most notably Bathmaker's, (2006) 'personal professional' discourse and Shain and Gleeson's (1999) discourse of 'strategic compliance', are evident in the responses from participants.

The aim of this research is to explore the contribution of policy and techniques, policy processes and performativity in the construction of teachers with SpLDs as subjects in the English FE sector. In relation to this, a wider exploration of policy processes and techniques of performativity on the FE sector have been presented. It is from this juncture that in the exploring of the additional variable of SpLD the more perverse consequences of a 'one size fits all' performative approach to the teaching profession becomes pronounced. As described in the literature on definitions of teaching as a profession, literature on teachers with SpLDs tends to limit itself to subjective experiences of individual teachers, paying particular attention to the resilient strategies adopted by teachers with SpLDs (see Burns & Bell, 2011; Burns, Poikkeus &

Aro, 2013; Glazzard & Dale, 2015; Griffiths, 2012; Macleod & Cebula, 2009; Riddick & English, 2006; Riddick, 2003). In addition, there are two reoccurring themes in the literature: the first concerns itself with the nuances of defining a specific learning difference; the second considers the matter of disclosing SpLD status to peers and managers in the workplace (O'Dwyer & Thorpe, 2013; Thorpe and Burns, 2016). Matters relating to disclosure are explored by the participants; many of the fears of disclosure echoed in the literature are recounted by the participants who disclosed they had a SpLD, or suspected they might.

Two of the participants that volunteered to take part in the research, disclosed they were dyslexic. They were not selected based on their SpLD status, however their experiences and responses have been invaluable in identifying the discourse of the 'cult of the performative teacher'. In addition, another participant disclosed they suspected they had a SpLD but had never pursued a formal diagnosis; explanations for this will be explored later in this chapter.

Although, participants were not asked directly about their thoughts on the notion of professionalism, the term teaching professional was often used. In particular, responses were inclined to portray the notion of a professional teacher as someone who performed certain duties and had a distinct philosophical belief that was driven by pedagogic student-centric values. One of the principals description of a teaching professional moves beyond the performative discourse that defines teachers as subjects accountable to measurable outputs (Ball, 2012). Instead, they describe a teaching professional that MacIntyre (1982,1988) in Ranson, (2003) argues is concerned with 'internal goods of excellence': a professional that is true to virtues of compassion, support, and integrity.

> *… as professionals we have a responsibility to be ensuring that everybody is meeting the standards that we need them to meet and this is a way of supporting people to meet them… me I think being an educational professional is being a civil servant in some ways, and I mean that in terms of somebody who is a civic leader, somebody who is building young people in our context capacity to be effective citizens and to be an effective citizen*

*might be to go to university and study a particular degree that leads you into a particular profession, or it might be somebody who is going to go straight into work or apprenticeship, or whatever. A good educational professional is somebody who sees the potential of young people and has a commitment to maximising that potential and that can take a number of different forms, but it has got to be rooted in that unconditional positive regard for young people, that belief that people matter and the people that matter the most are often the people you find the most difficult* (Participant O).

Furthermore, a middle manager proposes a teaching professional is someone that displays a level of commitment that goes beyond, and excels at the virtues of care and quality.

*A professional teacher doesn't count hours and I mean that in the sense that you want to do a good job, I am not saying you want to be sat in College every night but I think if you are constantly walking out the door at 4.15pm, unless there is a very good reason because you are a caring for children, or something like that, I would think why are you doing that, because if you care about the job you make sure you deliver good lessons, I mean I beat myself up if I don't and I remember the previous VP said to me, the hallmark of a very good teacher is just that element of insecurity, I could have done that lesson better, I didn't quite do that right, you are always looking at how to improve delivery. That means when you do deliver it right, you think yes that really worked, that is what good teachers do they are passionate about what they do. They are looking all the time could I have done it better, they care about the individuals they teach* (Participant H).

A teacher with pastoral responsibility shares similar sentiments in their description of an effective teaching professional:

*So many things (smiles) I think at the core there needs to be a good subject knowledge and I would put with that a passion for it as well, because if you have a passion or interest that normally rubs off somewhat on your students.*

> *But I think it is how you get that passion and that knowledge transferred onto your students* (Participant K).

The adjective 'passionate' and noun 'passion' are used by the participants to illustrate an attribute of professionalism that concerns itself with verve for teaching that is not confined by any preoccupation with measures and outputs.

However, concerns are expressed by participants in balancing the demands of the performative expectations of a teaching professional, with a focus on outputs and measures, alongside providing a duty to students to be compassionate, caring, knowledgeable and committed to a student's personal journey. Such a juxtaposition is illustrated in MacIntyres (1982, 1988, cited in Ranson, 2003) description of two distinguishable notions of accountability. The first, referenced earlier, concerns itself with 'internal goods of excellence' (virtues of justice, courage, friendship etc.), and the second with 'the extrinsic goods of effectiveness' (wealth, status, power etc.) (MacIntyre, 1982.1988, cited in Ranson, 2003:461). Interestingly, although participants expressed concerns about meeting expectations, notions of working hard and doing the very best were caught up in the language of resilience. A middle manager explains the strain of the expectations to uphold the 'extrinsic goods of effectiveness' may in fact lead to teachers leaving the profession.

> *Workload, too much to do, too much pressure, not being able to juggle everything and feeling completely overwhelmed… but because there is so much change all the time, it has become relentless and I think you know I find it difficult, I am used to it now and I know how to ride the storm, but I think if you struggle with a particular need or you have anxiety it must be an absolute nightmare to see the woods for the trees and to feel like you are doing a good job and I think there are probably a few people that say, everything is fine, everything is fine, because they are worried about looking like they are not coping because that is seen as a weakness… but I just think it is a human perception and therefore they perhaps don't fess up when things are getting overwhelming and I think that is awful as it becomes this*

*horrible spiral where people end up leaving the profession, because they are like, I have had enough* (Participant B).

The changes referred to, are in reference to the change in education policy in returning to linear A Levels. The return to the Linear A Level had a direct impact on teaching professionals in terms of the additional time needed to prepare for the reformed subjects, and with the space and time for teachers to reflect and plan for the 2nd year reduced, as students no longer break for the AS exams. Shain and Gleeson (1999) argue that teaching professionals are active in their reading of education policy, however they recognise the interpretation will be influenced by 'existing professional ideologies and perspectives' (Shain and Gleeson, 1999:453). Meaning that strategies and adaptions may vary; some interpretations might be more resistant whereas some maybe more compliant; such an argument implies that the notion of the teaching professional is complex and heterogeneous and therefore it cannot be limited to a catchall discourse of what it is to be a teaching professional. However, what is apparent in the account is the resilient strategy of absorbing new changes and taking on the responsibility of making the changes work, regardless of whether the teacher has exercised any agency in the decision to bring about the change.

However, there is evidence in the data to support the notion of a 'resistant' discourse of teaching professional, particularly when it came to carrying out performative routines the participants did not recognise as holding any professional value. The vice principal had this to say about the mandatory thirty hours of compulsory CPD introduced in 2007 by the New Labour government, and later revoked by the Coalition government in 2012 in an amendment to *The Education Act 2002*.

*It was infantilizing, I remember going to courses and they were saying here is your certificate for being on this course, you can put it in your IfL file, it was like being eleven, you got a certificate of attendance, my son gets them. No… I don't ever remember submitting anything to them, it was a zero consequence whether you did or you didn't. I don't think I did, no that was just ludicrous* (Participant P).

Albeit there is evidence in the data to support the discourse of teacher professionalism noted by Bathmaker and Avis (2013); Bathmaker, (2006); Shain and Gleeson (1999), what started to emerge from the data was a discourse of professionalism concerned with homogenous attributes, prescriptive techniques, and resilience. The notion of the 'cult of the performative teacher' emerged from participants responses to questions on what makes an effective teaching professional, and their thoughts on the lesson observation performance measure. The descriptions of a 'good' or 'effective' teaching professional by the participants formed a sort of performative 'cult' figure. Participants provided rote responses to the activities and behaviours a teaching professional should exude. During an interview with a teacher and tutor, they were asked what are the attributes of a 'good or effective teacher'; they chose to respond using the descriptor of 'good' - a word that may be more familiar to them in terms of categorising teachers.

> *We have got a few in our department and I think they are good because they are… so structurally they are good, so I think it is really important to have a question as a title, so there is an enquiry level approach to learning, where students have to work on an answer to something and the lesson is gathering evidence and figuring out how to answer that. Being thoughtful with the materials, so having things that student can learn from and engage with, but at the same time I don't think a good teacher is one who just uses those things in a lesson, a good teacher needs to have a really strong structure to the lesson, lead the lesson, students should know exactly where they are and what they are doing at all times and why they are doing it with a clear end point* (Participant I).

The emerging 'cult of the performative teacher' was never more pronounced than when the two teachers diagnosed with the SpLD - Dyslexia, discussed their experiences and concerns. They recounted examples of how they differed from the cult figure of the normative neuro-typical teacher; in most of their examples they described themselves as deficient. One of them had this to say about why they should not be a humanities teacher

*And I think that so one of the things I find hardest is holding on to detail, I have no ability to hold onto detail what-so-ever. And therefore I shouldn't be a [names subject], I have no ability to hold onto years, I taught the [names subject content] recently and it has come up in one of my lessons, I don't even know what century it was, I haven't got a clue, I kept being asked in last lesson when it was…*

*I can't remember jack shit about what I taught last week. And I am open with my students that I am dyslexic, I say it in my first lesson. I have to because of my numbers and I have to otherwise I look like the crapist [names subject] teacher in the whole world (laughs), cause I have no idea of any detail, they will say something to me and I will say I don't know who that is and they will say we did that a couple of weeks ago, and I am like oh okay, well I taught that then. I can't remember the name or the date, but I can't remember*
(Participant I, Teacher and Tutor with SpLD).

In addition, the other teacher who had disclosed their SpLD status, had this to say about their need to have access to spellcheck functionality on all work databases:

*I do remember talking to somebody that our database didn't use to have spellcheck, which I rely on, so I used to have to write everything in a word document and copy and paste it across just because you are usually sending that to students and or parents, as a teacher there is this thing that you should be able to spell, so I think I was obviously very wary of that…*
(Participant K, Cross college role and Teacher with SpLD).

Of interest is the assertive language 'should' and 'shouldn't' in conjunction with their notions of a cult teaching professional: someone who can 'hang onto detail', who can spell, has a good memory; in short someone who can perform in a way that can be measured. With detail knowledge can be proven, and proof of knowledge can be, and is measured during the performative technique of the formal lesson observation process. One of the teachers do go on to acknowledge a strength compared to their neuro-typical counterparts, however it is followed

by examples of how they might be perceived as falling short of the performative cult figure of a teaching professional.

> *… but I can tell you how to write an essay, how to structure a source question and I can teach that really well and my lessons have got clear opening questions and all the time we are thinking about that and all the time we are thinking about the bigger picture, how something changes over time, how it always relates back to that question, and I know that other teachers cannot necessarily do that… I can work quite well with dyslexic students with structure of essays with paragraphs, with [type] questions and also I don't know if you get many people saying this, I can tell when a student is dyslexic and they don't know and I spend a lot of my time referring students to our learning support department, two actually said to me yesterday you are the one that figured out we were dyslexic. So I feel quite strongly when I see a student who is dyslexic that they get that support* (Participant I).

When asked whether they received a positive response after declaring their SpLD to students, it could be argued that the disclosure of their SpLD status is issued as some form of disclaimer for potentially not meeting the expectations of the 'cult of performative teacher'. Of particular interest is the use of the word 'perfect' and their description of their dyslexia as a potential 'drawback'. They eloquently describe the strengths of their teaching methods, and yet the performative discourse of the 'cult of the performative teacher' appears to dominate their perception of what it is to be a teaching professional. The measure of 'detail' is repeated and the strength of the impact of the perceived deficiency is expressed in the admission that at times they thought they might be 'in the wrong job'. A more disconcerting point is made near the end of the quote, where they describe the fact that their students get good results as ironic. This is where the notion of 'extrinsic goods of effectiveness' in the form of measurable outputs dominates the qualitative skills they describe regarding essay writing, and is an example of the participants own 'intrinsic goods of excellence' (MacInyre, 1982, 1988, cited in Ranson, 2003).

The strengths outlined above mirror that of those found in Griffiths (2012) comparative study on teachers and nurses with SpLDs. Griffiths also found the participants understood their own strengths and used the tools and techniques they had developed 'in their own schooling' to assist the students they now taught (Griffiths, 2012:59).

One of the teachers with a SpLD expressed some of the vulnerability they felt in disclosing to students, while at the same time reflecting on the positive effect the disclosure may have for the students.

> *Very, students who are dyslexic in the class can see they react to it when the teacher says at the beginning of the lesson. I say it because I speak very fast, I get my numbers wrong on the board, I say things wrong, last lesson said the wrong [names content] it was completely wrong but they feel really comfortable to pick me up on that, I said you need to tell me when I make mistakes, I think they feel quite empowered with that... but you know when I tell a class I am dyslexic I am partly revealing a weakness, I am saying there is something about me that is not perfect and it is a drawback, I'm… it's, it's a vulnerability to say I am dyslexic.*
>
> *That's the other thing when I disclose to a class I am very nervous because I know I will get very nervous around that, because I know some students will dismiss me and that is a very vulnerable place to be put into. When a student goes, oh well [pronoun] is not going to be any good as a teacher then is [pronoun]. It is a vulnerable position, but I will always say it because it explains why I teach how I do and I need them to know that, to do with writing on the board, my numbers, mixing up places and not being able to remember what I taught the week before. That was another thing that made me wobble about being a [names subject'] teacher, my inability to hold on to any sort of detail at all, as at times it made me really think about leaving teaching and go into something which is much more about organising things on Word documents, sorting stuff, making text books or something, where I*

*don't have to have the memory of the detail. And that has played over my career when I am struggling a little, am I in the wrong job* (Participant I).

They continue to reflect and conclude by describing themselves as successful for meeting the performative expectations of providing outputs in the form of 'good results':

*But you know I am a [names subject] teacher and it is ironic but I get good results because I understand the other stuff, essay writing, and my HoD recognises that is what I am good at, whether she makes a link directly that is because I am dyslexic I am not sure. But I always joke with her I will teach the skills and X will do the detail* (Participant I).

In addition, they express concern at the perception students, parents and potential employers might have at the disclosure of the SpLD.

*Because they would think that I am not fit for the job, you don't want to have a [names subject] who can't remember dates. So absolutely not, it was something I disclosed at [names employer], I am very comfortable at [names employer], I haven't disclosed at previous jobs, that is something I have done as I have got older, more confident, I realised it was an advantage in the classroom and also when I have realised how useful it is to tell my class, it quite important that I tell them* (Participant I).

The other teacher who had declared their SpLD status presented a more nuanced response to the matter of disclosure. However, the same 'cult of the performative teacher' discourse dominated their response. The statement 'a teacher who is supposed to be you know this sort of perfect being of all knowledge' is of particular interest, as it comes back to this notion of proving through knowledge an individual's eligibility to be considered a teaching professional.

*Maybe only in terms of a parents evening, but it has been more through talking to the student and then kind of… so it might of just been that I was happy to say it in front of… you know. Possibly I can't remember as much, but yeah it is not something that I hide but I also don't declare it all the time to my students. I think sometimes, I think some students give up and you*

*know, I don't know, I have sometimes used it when I thought it would be helpful for them to understand that a teacher who is supposed to be you know this sort of perfect being of all knowledge and all the rest of it as "yeah I have dyslexia" mine might be different from yours, this is what I do, have you tried this? It starts more of a dialogue. I mean I hate writing on the board and if I have spelt something wrong, I will just go "oh sorry that is my dyslexia for you" which you know it may be helpful to some students but may be not to others if it is a bit dismissive, or I don't know, it is just the way I have worked with it. You are trying to demonstrate it doesn't stop you from doing something….*

*… perhaps you know maybe a student and or if they have mentioned it to a parent, the parent might think how are you going to help with the essay writing of my child (Laughs) because I can still do that. And I just mark with a dictionary on my phone or on a laptop to check spellings I am not sure of, so you know you work around it obviously that is the whole point to learn how to overcome certain things and you just put other strategies in place…so I think I haven't been worried about saying it because I can justify, I am damn good at my job and I will do whatever, so I think because I can justify it* (Participant K).

Of interest is the incorporating of 'strategies' to assist in managing the performative demands of teaching. In the literature on teachers with SpLDs the strategies are often described as 'resilient' (see Burns, Poikkeus & Aro, 2013; Burns & Bell, 2011, 2010; Glazzard & Dale, 2015), and are exerted at the micro level by the affected individual. The literature on teaching professionalism referred to at the opening of this chapter does not explicitly use the language of resilience, however the strategies adopted by the teachers and managers documented in the literature are similar in their form. This thesis argues that the language of 'strategy' or 'resilience' is a by-product of performative discourse, which subjugates the professional - regardless of SpLD status - to adopt performative techniques in the guise of 'resilience strategies' in order to cope with the every growing performative demands of the FE sector.

Furthermore, a middle manager discusses the teaching methods and strategies used by colleagues with an SpLD, in particular they express admiration for the lessons they observed and concluded that they thought the lesson to be 'better' than ones they had observed of neuro-typical teachers. The important take away point here being that the level of resilience planning the teachers with SpLDs had undertaken to ensure they could perform as teaching professionals.

> *There was colleague who I used to manage who because he didn't want to be trapped by writing on the board and making mistakes, so when I watched him teach I was really captivated by how he avoided being pushed into a situation where he would have to write freely on the board. He thought about all the likely responses that kids would come up with, it was a very tightly structured lesson, I thought in many ways this is a much better lesson than people without disabilities would teach. But what was critical to me was he knew about his disability and prepared his lesson accordingly. He had not just pitched up and hoped for the best. Interestingly there is another teacher with the same thing, really prepared and thought about how kids might respond to her particular tasks and so again, she hadn't trapped herself to write freely on the board* (Participant H).

At a denotative reading of the language used, it could be argued they are doing little more than describing adjustments made by the teacher with SpLD to ensure they can deliver an effective lesson. However, a connotative reading describes a more vulnerable situation for the teacher with SpLDs in the use of the word 'trapped' and 'pushed'. It could be argued that underlying the middle managers account is the 'cult of the performative teacher' discourse, which prescribes what teachers should be able to do: write on the board, spell, provide the detail; in short perform and carry out tasks that can prove they are an effective teaching professional. The notion of proof is expanded on further in their response to the question on external support for teachers with SpLDs. They begin by exclaiming the fact that as teachers with SpLDs exist the process and act of being a teacher could not be a barrier to them. They qualify their opinion further by

stating proof in the form of an undergraduate degree and post graduate teaching qualification prove teacher professional eligibility.

> *I think if someone has a learning disability and has qualified as a teacher, my god that couldn't happen if that was a barrier to them being a teacher in the first place…*
>
> *I think there is an assumption that if you are a teacher, you have proved yourself in a way by getting a degree and the PGCE, there is just an assumption that you can cope and I think a lot of schools with NQTs… You have to prove you have the resilience, the grit to establish yourself as a teacher and to a certain extent that is true. But at the same time you would want someone who is struggling to say I am finding this really difficult, can you help me, and what can I do to cope* (Participant H).

In response to a question requesting clarification on the point that if an individual had gotten through their undergraduate and teacher training they should be able to do the job the middle manager stated:

> *Yes, and the students have the same expectations they expect that their teachers can do certain things* (Participant H).

The quote illustrates perfectly that the onus is on the teaching professional themselves to take a micro agency approach to adopting resilience strategies. Resilience is described almost like a 'rite of passage' towards earning the desired professional 'spurs'. However, what is expressed in the accounts of another middle manager (Participant B) and both the teachers who disclosed their SpLD status is a situation in which the resilience strategies are little more than reformulated performative techniques, in support of a regime of truth that depicts a 'one size fits all' projection of the 'cult of the performative teacher'.

What has been presented so far in this chapter is the process through which the 'cult of the performative teacher' is accepted by all as the norm. The origin of the aspirational cult figure of the performative teacher appears to be in the adopting of resilience strategies, a technique that has been normalised in the FE sector. The FE sector appears to unquestionably accept, or

more damningly, be subject to the cult figure, leading to the perpetuation of a homogenous workforce and the pursuit of an ideal that bears no resemblance to the reality of a teaching professional.

In the next sub-heading the teacher with SpLDs is explored further in terms of exploring the policy process. The policy processes and techniques at the meso level are interrogated for the purpose of understanding whether there is recognition that the FE workforce is a heterogeneous one at the organisation level. Furthermore it is important to understand the processes and protocols once a member of staff has declared, in order to conclude on whether policy and policy techniques contribute to the construction of teachers with SpLDs as subjects.

## 7.2 Teacher with SpLD: disclosure, and policy

During the interview with the middle manager with CPD responsibility, they declared a close family member had just been diagnosed with dyslexia, and they had for some time suspected that they might be dyslexic themselves. When asked whether they had thought to pursue a formal diagnosis they responded in the negative. Particular concerns were raised about how they might be perceived:

> *When I was writing my UCAS references, which would have been a year ago at one point my TTL* (Tutor Team Leader) *kind of got a bit grumpy with some of my grammar I think and I did say to her at that point that since my son was diagnosed with dyslexia, and I can see I have some of the tendencies, but I have done a lot of writing, you know, I wrote text books and things and she was very kind to me again, I didn't want to be pulling a dyslexic card, I felt it was quite a useful thing to say just because I thought, and the good thing teachers can kind of know what that means and I think it is true…*
>
> *I don't see… am going to say no, partly because of my age, I think I am only going to work for a couple more years and I would be concerned that it might be interpreted in a negative light and I just wonder realistically, you know it's*

*not that I would be asking for anything specific, I wouldn't be asking for an extension when I had to do writing… But no… and I must say, you know I thought about it more after my son was diagnosed and I never knew… and I advised him a lot, but I never knew if it was the right thing to say you have been diagnosed with dyslexia or not, you know I just think it might be read by somebody who would see it as a negative…* (Participant C).

The comments and experiences expressed previously by both the two participants who have been formally diagnosed, and the middle manager who suspects they may be dyslexic, portray a vulnerability over the certainty of how a disclosure of SpLD status will be received. In addition, the middle manager (Participant C), provides a somewhat defensive response in trying to reconcile their own suspicion of being dyslexic alongside the ability to write a text book. Of interest is the reference to the notion of 'pulling a dyslexic card'; the implication in this statement positions recall and processing of language considerations as an advantage for the individual with a SpLD, rather than a legitimate example of a reasonable adjustment.

Furthermore, both participants who declared their SpLD status, when asked about the governments 'Access to Work' scheme had this to say.

*I might have done but I didn't think that really related to me, I think that is for disabilities and I don't see it, I find it hard to see it as a disability in the legal sense, do you know what I mean? I find it odd when it is on a form like that. Because I think there are people where I work that are disabled and that is obvious, so I sort of feel that I am encroaching on…you know they really are, you know* (Participant I).

*I think I have heard of it but I am not sure I would have associated it with dyslexia… I am not sure why. I think probably because sometimes because of the wording, because I think when I applied at university it was still called student disability whatever (Interviewer explains the difference between*

> *Disability Student Allowance (DSA) and the work based 'Access to Work' (AtW) scheme). I heard of it but I associated it with more physical or possibly mental health, but I had not recognised it as something I could look into, but I might now look into it (laughs)* (Participant K).

It is somewhat curious that although they recounted receiving support under the social characteristic of 'disabled' as a student via the government disability student allowance (DSA) scheme, they did not perceive themselves as eligible for the workplace AiW scheme whereby the same social identifier of 'disabled' applied. In addition, the teacher and tutor with a SpLD, also recounted the support they had received as an undergraduate, however they were unable to recall any practical assistance during their teacher training year:

> *I was trying to remember and yes I got extra time on my assessments, I had tuition for my assessments for the maths and English, that is where I learned all the English stuff, because I had tuition from the university, but I don't remember getting any help on the PGCE, so for instance lesson planning was a nightmare for me and I don't… it was only around the external tests that I got support* (Participant I).

The disparity in the expectations of support from the formative to summative years is illustrated in the observation made. Furthermore, their use of the word 'childish' to describe how they feel as an adult disclosing is an interesting one:

> *I feel a bit childish saying it, oh I am dyslexic, it is a childish thing to say, I do tell people, but it is odd telling peers that I am dyslexic, peers outside the college, so mum friends because it is an odd thing to say, cause it is a childish thing to say you are dyslexic* (Participant I).

They reference the nomenclature of 'learning difficulty' - one of the catchall terms under which conditions such as dyslexia reside:

> *Difficulty learning to read, difficulty writing, you learn to read, you learn to write, so the problem should be finished* (Participant I).

The biomedical prevailing discourse positions disability and difference as something that can be fixed, with the onus on the affected individual to do the fixing (Fitzgibbon & O'Connor, 2002). The above observation draws attention to the misconception that dyslexia is something that you either grow out of, or something that can be overcome with enough effort.

Albeit participants from middle and senior management expressed an inclusive approach to supporting teachers with SpLDs, neither of the FE colleges in the sample population had an explicit policy directive stating process and protocols for staff that declared a SpLD. A middle manager stated:

> *So you have to just think what do I do with a kid that has this problem, they get through their A Levels. Teachers with dyslexia need more time, they need to think about the processes, fine, give them a longer deadline and the way they structured their lessons is up to them* (Participant H).

Another middle manager recounted a meeting where the matter of support for teachers with SpLDs was raised.

> *I do remember somebody once years ago saying in a divisional meeting you know we do all this for students and then, but I don't know something like there is nobody there if we have a problem and they were talking about like dyslexia or the equivalent, it made a real impact on me because that was the first time I had thought you know gosh that is true actually* (Participant C).

Although they did not elaborate on whether there was a response to the question asked during the meeting, they were very clear in their response to the question on whether a policy existed on how teachers with SpLD may be assisted.

> *No, no… Not that I am aware of… I would… it would be more that I would go and ask someone like [names learning support manager] who has a nice friendly face and who knows a lot about these things and see if she had any suggestions. I mean if I had somebody who joined the team and said that they were dyslexic and maybe asked what could the College provide, maybe*

*then I would go to personnel, but if it was me floundering around trying to work out what I could do to help somebody who might be a little bit reluctant I would go to* [names learning support manager] (Participant C).

In addition, the following accounts appear to be drawn from the support in place for students.

*Yeah, we are very lucky because we have got a really strong learning support department here and they are a very good source of advice and indeed it might be you want to refer that member of staff onto be formally assessed, it maybe that they have already come with a diagnoses and have been assessed in terms of the specific ways in which they can be best supported. And we have had example, I could cite five or six members of staff where we have made adjustments for them, whether it is buying software for them or you know, quite a few IT solutions, but equally where we have given more time for certain tasks to be completed and things like that, but that often depends on the specifics of their need. So yeah I think my first port of call would be to seek advice from the experts that we have sort of in-house* (Participant O, Principal).

*I know the whole reasonable adjustments stuff is something that we do for people with any form of disability, in this case difference, so we guide them towards that. Can they with reasonable adjustments still effectively carry out their duties and if that's the case we make reasonable adjustments and do that. For all staff. If someone needs mechanisms for proof reading we can provide things like that if that was required. But yeah, I think as an organisation we would do and be committed to* (Participant P, Vice Principal).

The vice principal went on to clarify the college where they work had clear support in place for students, but the same clarity was not in place for staff with SpLDs; albeit they were confident that reasonable adjustments would be made on request:

> *No, I think we would, it does fall under the reasonable adjustments which is something we do all the time with staff… but there isn't anything on the intranet… I think to be honest it would be more ad-hoc, what's the difference? Therefore what is the impact going to be, how can we resolve it, I think would be the approach* (Participant P).

The approach taken by the two colleges appears to illustrate Ball's (1994) understanding on how policy is peopled; Ball argues that policies pose problems that require contextual solutions. It could be argued that a certain level of 'ad hoc-ery and messiness' should be expected when it comes to policy interpretation. However, while it is appreciated that the adjustment or consideration might vary depending on the 'need' of the member of staff with an SpLD, the absence of a policy outlining a framework of the process is at best disconcerting; at worst it could be argued as discriminatory if institutions do not attempt to meet the reasonable adjustment duty of the *EOA 2010.*

In addition, participants were unable as a collective to identify in their own organisations or the FE sector as a whole, the number of staff in the workforce that had a SpLD. Furthermore, they were unable to cite either from the meso level organisation in which they worked, or at the wider meso FE sector, a distinct policy process which considered teachers with SpLDs and how the enactment of reasonable adjustments could be actioned (*EOA, 2010*).

Before the matter is explored further, and with the intention of placing the critique within the FE sector context, it might be useful to return to the point made by the FE and HE consultant on the drivers behind behaviour in the FE sector.

> *… the requirements of Ofsted push behaviour, they make them behave in certain ways to chase what is defined as being important. And what's important is that which is measured, yeah when in fact we might be measuring stuff that is completely irrelevant, we don't know, that is what we measure, so that is what we put are efforts into* (Participant M).

To lead on from the point, the former policy officer was asked whether in their experience at the DfE there was any mention or reference to teaching professionals with a SpLD.

> *I never saw anything about neurodiversity and teachers not anywhere, this is why what you are doing is really important because I don't think it figures at all in peoples thinking obviously they might start thinking about it for pupils but not in terms of teachers, so if people where developing stuff for teachers you think mainly in terms of their academic background and maybe their specialism, their expertise, their level of experience maybe, so you know if teachers need certain things and so on, I have never seen anything in relation to teachers, any other characteristics, like fairly obvious things like part-time workers or you know disabled teachers or you know single parents or anything like that that did not really figure…* (Participant R).

In addition, they qualified their response by referencing what they perceived to be an ineffectual equality impact assessment (EIA) process during DfE formal consultations:

> *… well I might surprise you with the first part of the answer is yes, so EIA were done pretty much all the time the influence they had was negligible though… so quite often you were required to include an inequality assessment, they were fairly short and brief and it was more like and we have considered this and we don't really see there will be any impact on different groups or you might say you know this is a policy that is going to encourage more girls into science therefore this is going to be really good for equality because we are going to get more girls to do something and that is an equality thing so yeah, I don't know if there was any systematic process and there certainly wasn't any set approach involved for like going through lots of different sets of groups and thinking what exactly is this going to have, it was more a case of we have got to attach something that looks like an EIA so that we can show that we have done it. I never saw a single case where that influenced any decision that was made, if you see what I mean. It was*

> *more about just having it there rather than it actually making a difference* (Participant R).

A similar account was provided by one of the principals when asked if they had ever come across any guidance/policy by Ofsted that acknowledged the potential of inspecting teaching staff with a SpLD.

> *No, that is never been in any of the conferences I have been on, either Ofsted specific conferences or where I have heard representatives of Ofsted speak, in any of the documentation in around the current Sif, just thinking to think about all the contexts in which you know or indeed with actual individual inspection teams, no that has never been a question that has been asked, how many staff do you have here for whom that might be relevant* (Participant O).

The former principal also stated they did not receive any directive from the DfE and/or the government on how to accommodate teachers with SpLDs:

> *Unless they were buried away in small print that I am not aware of, it was definitely low key, even with the joint statement where you tried to combine your commitment, learning needs and disability came a long way below race and gender as being more topical and definitely staff well behind students in that sense. I mean reasonable adjustments I am more use to after coming back to work after as physical injury. Much more obviously physical things, rather than however you define dyscalculia something that is less visible and isn't necessarily been a temporary thing either. So no I have never had any guidance as to what might be a reasonable way of approaching somebody with those sort of issues* (Participant F).

In the absence of policy guidance or processes that consider specific considerations for teaching staff with SpLDs, an ad-hoc, inconsistent, or in some cases non-existent approach is adopted by the FE sector. The WAC report presented at Westminster in January 2018 identified seven key areas, three of which are of particular interest: lack of awareness on all levels, government measures are inadequate-including the *EOA 2010* and the failure of reasonable

adjustments (WAC, 2018). Albeit the following accounts by the participants present an intention to be inclusive, they fall short of providing a distinct policy at either the micro or meso level to ensure a consistent approach in accommodating teachers with SpLDs.

In the main participants did not use the legal term of 'reasonable adjustments', most dropped the word 'reasonable' and instead used language such as support. One of the middle managers stated.

> *So you have to just think what do I do with a kid that has this problem, they get through their A Levels. Teachers with dyslexia need more time, they need to think about the processes, fine, give them a longer deadline and the way they structured their lessons is up to them* (Participant H).

Interestingly, when they were asked how easy it was for them as a manager to make reasonable adjustments, they provided an example of a staff member with a medical condition, but referred to the condition as a 'different learning need'. It could be argued that such a statement further supports the findings in the WAC (2018) report around a lack of awareness of SpLD conditions, and the adjustments a staff member needs to make to be able to complete neuro-typical tasks. Although they go on to make a point about shared responsibility in as much as the member of staff has a responsibility to declare.

> *Yes, I have a member of staff who has a different learning need at the moment, she is epileptic… She couldn't remember what was happening and what we followed this up with as a reasonable adjustment… So it does require a bit of responsibility on the part of the person as they have to make you aware of what they can do, they can't be moaning, no one ever does this, did you tell us? It is not that schools and colleges don't care, I think they are busy people and often they don't stop and think as they don't have time to and you have to tell them and you have to badger them. I can see why someone might feel embarrassed to do that, cause not everyone will have time. A good manager will take time to try and help* (Participant H).

The matter of time and ad-hoc support is also mentioned by another middle manager in their response to a question on whether a meso policy process exists to guide managers on how to accommodate a teacher with SpLDs.

> *I don't think there is a formal process. I did have a look through the handbook and I couldn't see anything there, I did have a look at the bit on learning support and I did think is there a bit on staff that might have learning support, but it was all students. And I actually thought it would be really useful to know what to do…* (Participant B).

They make an interesting reflective point on the impact of having to accommodate a particular member of staff's reasonable adjustment. Their account highlights the burden at micro department level in the absence of an explicit meso policy process in place to guide managers.

> *But of course, not that I mind at all, impacts on my workload, but I don't mind that, but it would be nice if there was a system in place, where people knew right okay this is….I mean there are checks anyway. I think more awareness and actually people work together and we all assume that everybody works in the same way and we don't, we ought to be supportive and just think that is just probably that and just let it go* (Participant B).

The two teachers with SpLDs account echoes that of the middle manager's (Participant B) account of ad-hoc support being offered at micro line management level, with the distinct absence of any directive from the meso SLT management level.

> *My boss she's brilliant with it, she actually asked early on whether there is anything we need to do and she, as soon as I say that something is tricky she responds to that and takes it on-board. And she is very open to understanding that if I have a difficulty of something that is related to that she takes that away, but she did ask early on* (Participant I).

In response to the question on whether the manager was following any particular college policy, they stated:

> *I doubt that I just think it is my HoD, I think it is just her* (Participant I).

The other teacher with a SpLD had declared their SpLD when they started at the College, but no one had spoken to them about reasonable adjustments and the only consideration given had been negotiated with their line manager.

> *So we, there is two things, we do have a staff handbook and I have not read every page of it (laughs) it is something I have referred to as and when things come up, or they highlight that they have changed something, so I can't recall, there might be something in the staff handbook and that is readily available, I just have not sat down and read every page… Whereas I have definitely just mentioned to my HoD this is going to take me a bit longer because of blah, one key thing is I said I cannot skim read stuff, often I will say give it to me I will read it and come back to you, rather than can you just have a look at this, I would say no, not if you want me to properly take it in and give you some feedback, so those kind of things I kind of do as and when* (Participant K).

However, in response to a question on whether they had received a positive outcome following the declaration to their line manager, they provided a troubling response:

> *Yeah I think it is just, maybe it might have been like, sometimes I suppose it is just that perhaps it has been forgotten and they will go, oh yeah of course that is fine, sometimes it might feel a bit more, but I really just need your answer on this, and I might not be able to… because I want to spend a little bit more time on it and maybe they don't have that time, sometimes that can be just a pressure that is not you know, so I will say I will do my best and see how far I get, that kind of thing. Sometimes things have been read to me, but I don't find that helpful, so I then just say I will still read it myself or I will just say it's fine, so I think it is just sort of trying to be helpful, but you want to do it your own way, but yeah mostly positive, yeah okay that's fine… I wish you could just be able to do that, or I wish there was someone else that I could*

*quickly ask, but then I suppose it is just well sorry, it is just not going to work (laughs) you know, or it just has to be delayed* (Participant K).

Their experience is particularly troubling as it is an example of what the participant with a equality national role, in a membership organisation, referred to as 'micro-aggressions'; interestingly the concern of micro-aggressions is also raised by participants in the WAC 2018 report. Micro-aggressive behaviour is not always intentional and tends to be more implicit than explicit, nonetheless there is an undercurrent of positioning the recipient as deficient.

*There is an interesting thing around of lot of discriminatory behaviour is very micro, it is called micro-aggressions, so it won't be direct, we wished you didn't work here because you are disabled. But there will be those small comments, drip, drip, oh you are late again, or you know… oh you've only done 75% of your scripts it just drips and it is very hard for someone to bundle that up into a grievance…* (Participant L).

It is unlikely that someone with a physical disability would be required to remind their direct line manager or employer of their access needs. Griffiths (2012) argues the disparity in treatment between those who are physically disabled and those with neuro-diverse conditions is due to the lack of including neuro-diverse conditions in debates on inclusion.

Of interest is the former policy officer's thoughts on why adjustments appear to be initiated and agreed at the micro level of departmental line managers, and not as a response to meso level college management directives. In particular, the response returns the discussion to the point made by the FE & HE consultant, on behaviour drivers in the FE sector.

*… it is the accountability framework that drives behaviour particularly for the principals… your line manager further down isn't necessarily directly influenced by the accountability measures, so they might take a slightly more enlighten view on things or understand things in a wider way. From the principals point of view their job, their entire career in fact needs that job, it is*

> *not just your job it is your career, is driven entirely by Ofsted frankly and so it is what Ofsted says and everything else is secondary. It might be a very nice thing but if I don't have the headspace, the funding or resources to do it I can't do it because I have got to do these things because that is my job and everything pins on that* (Participant R).

The accounts above of the implicit expectation for teachers with SpLDs to adopt resilience strategies is pronounced in the absence of any policy or protocols recognising anything outside the normative of the cult of the performative teacher. The performative technique of resilience places the onus of navigating through the performative accountability measures firmly at the micro level of the teacher with SpLDs. The nuance on the matter of disclosure further illustrates the hegemonic influence of the 'cult of the performative teacher'. To declare at the micro level would be admittance by affected teachers that they do not meet the criteria of the cult figure, portrayed implicitly in policy documents and protocols at the meso institutional level. Similarly, if at the meso level of the FE sector neurodiversity is considered, then potentially formulaic and reductive 'one size fits all' approaches risk becoming redundant. More importantly, this thesis argues that if teachers are recognised as being heterogeneous beings, then policy and policy techniques that underpin the 'cult of the performative teacher' are no longer fit for purpose. Gaping flaws will thus be exposed in the performative education system, which are unlikely to be addressed by a standardised, formulaic process.

In the next sub-heading the inquiry will move on to exploring the enactment of policy at both the micro and meso levels of the policy process. The intention of this is to better illustrate the practice of agency by the policy actor participants featured in this thesis. Questions around the consultation process, in terms of who takes part and in what form, will provide an insight into whether policy actors are instrumental in the writing of policy, or as identified earlier are relegated to contribute only to the implementation of policy. The exploration into the policy process is essential if we are to better understand how the process of subjecification is formed.

## 7.3 Policy Consultation Process (the formal, informal process and who is consulted)

One of the objectives of the research presented in this thesis is to understand who the key policy actors are in the generation and enactment of policy, in this particular instance education policy in England. In order to explore this matter participants were asked to recount the process for introducing new policy into the institutions where they worked, and to gauge some understanding of the consultation process at the micro level, alongside any thoughts and experiences they may have on how policy is consulted at the meso level. To aid the reader, the micro level encompasses policy that is consulted and formed at the individual level, between distinct individuals, that may or may not be part of the same organisation. In addition, the micro level captures policy consultation at individual department level in situations where the individual department is only representative of itself and not the wider organisation, i.e. a single curriculum department setting a policy directive within its own setting that is not a directive for the institution as a whole (Thorpe & Burns, 2016).

The meso level is policy that is consulted and formed at the institution level, where certain directives of the policy are mandatory for all individuals/departments that reside within the institution (Thorpe & Burns, 2016). In addition, the meso level captures policy consultation and formation between interconnected institutions, with the intention of exploring the branching relationships in policy formation between the institutions represented in the education workforce of two FE colleges, and participants from the FE sector. Furthermore, the relationships of participants are explored with the purpose of identifying the existence of key policy actors. Definitions of policy and policy actors are discussed in the literature (see Ball, *et al*., 2011; Ball, 1994; Bowe, *et al*., 1992; Braun, *et al*., 2010; Dale, 1989; Raab, 1994; Risborough, 1992). Of interest, there are two opposing thoughts: the first is Dale (1989), who argues that policy in the round is decided by politicians that do not operate within the education setting of a school or college, resulting in policy getting 'done to' people. Conversely, Bowe, *et al*. (1992) and Braun, *et al*. (2010) argue against what they refer to as the 'managerial perspective'; they state that education policy as a working document is open to various interpretations. Therefore, teachers

and other education workers are ‘key actors’ in the policy cycle process and should not be simply viewed as ‘subjects’.

During the interviews with participants what emerged was a more nuanced practice and experience of policy generation and enactment than the current literature portrays (see Ball, 1994, 1997; Boocock, 2014; Coffield, 2007; Edward & Coffield, 2007; Hodgson, *et al*., 2007; Newman, 2002; Power, 1992; Smith & O’Leary 2013; Rabb, 1994). In addition, albeit participants at times claimed they had no agency over policy creation and enactment when they recounted their experiences, they often provided examples to the contrary. In general it was difficult to substantially support the claim by Dale (1989) that policy ‘gets done’ to those working in FE colleges. Instead, the data gathered presents a more complex and less linear explanation of the policy cycle process. There are opportunities in the data to identify what could be described as key policy actors. However, the term is used with some caution as it was not clear whether those that could be described as key policy actors were distinct enough to be considered with any permanency as a key policy actor.

The perception of who was part of the policy consultation process at a college meso and micro level appeared at first to be clearer to the two teachers interviewed who had no formal managerial responsibility. However, of the two teachers one of them was more certain in their belief that lay teachers were not consulted at a micro department level, nor at the wider meso college level.

The first teacher had this to say about the internal College consultation process on the introduction of progression exams following the reformed Linear A Levels:

> *No, no. Our* [Line Manager] *came to us and told us a decision had been made, it was a* [Line Manager] *decision made at the* [Line Managers] *meeting, where they decided what the progression exam would be like, she was very cross because there was a real split between the* [Line Managers] *about whether to make up a question or to have the old A Level exam. So*

*there was… she came quickly to us and said what's your opinion, I need to know from you guys to feed it up and we all told her what we thought and she took it back, but it was quite clear that was her choice to come to us, so we were not involved in that at all, that was her decision above us…*

*… and another thing has happened - the dates of the exams have been decided by the Exams Officer following last year's paper, last year's real exam and it has be replicated rather than thinking about our needs for marking it, so for instance [names subject] is last, [names subject and one other subject] are the biggest papers to mark… and senior leadership were completely confused about that, oh we didn't think of that, that we would need that marking time, we have one marking day and my [names subject] paper is the last one and I am part-time so I have one day to mark all of those, so that is an example of decisions made without any consultation with us at all* (Participant I).

Of interest, is the interweaving between what could be described as a formal and informal trajectory of the consultation process. Albeit it is their perception that the line manager was acting on their own volition and had not been instructed by senior management to seek the views of the department, their account conflicts with the principal (Participant N) from the same college in their account of the internal consultation process.

The principal was explicitly asked whether line managers were expected to consult with their staff and then report back to middle management. They made a curious confession regarding the awareness of a 'block' in the tiered consultation process:

*I am going to be brutally honest with you here, yes. And that didn't necessarily happen in that meeting because there is a separate meeting which you may of picked up which is called Divisional* [Line Managers]*, so that then would then flow from curriculum management chaired by the deputy which is largely the three divisional directors, part of their agenda is to set the agenda for the divisional* [Line Manager] *meetings and that should*

*flow down to department meetings. If there's one thing and this is not necessarily connected to curriculum reform but one thing that I have learned this year is to look at communication because it is quite clear that in some areas there has been a block… in some cases it may be a divisional block, but more commonly it is a* [Line Manager] *block the people that are doing the teaching had not been informed of the process for and the thinking behind decision making. Now that is not true in all cases but there was snippets that caused some difficulty* (Participant N).

To further clarify the point, they were asked whether they could recall if they had received any departmental feedback from the line managers regarding the introduction of the progression exams. They provided an arguably contradictory response, inasmuch as they acknowledge the response from the line manager was more likely to be from a 'personal' perspective.

*No… urrmmm in some cases yes, but I think... it was probably more the case that they were speaking as the representative of their department as the leader of their department, so it was to that extent a personal leadership perspective* (Participant N).

The second teacher with no managerial responsibility (Participant K) provided a response which philosophically expressed the importance of consulting teaching staff on policy, such as the progression exams. However, they were unable to definitively say whether the results from the consultation with their line manager was fed back to senior management.

*Yeah I think with some of them there has been and I think it is because if you do hold some sort of consultation you going to get some good ideas and there might be something that someone else might not have considered that comes through, all the kind of you know… the sort of things we do day in and day out so actually we know that is not going to be effective. You know on our level of the teaching or whatever, whereas perhaps somebody who is a bit higher up and has less teaching may not have recognised a certain pitfall or something like that, so I would say I think it probably happens a little bit more at the* [Line Manager] *meetings which obviously I am not involved*

*in… And so I suppose it is just whether that is drip fed down to the teaching within each department... So yeah, myself and the [Line Manager] had to discuss what would work for us and then that went back up to the divisional director who I assume took it back up to kind of senior management and so… roughly we now think it is possible to do what we want to do (laughs) and that came from us saying we need to do something slightly different to what you are proposing, so we actually do an assessment in the first year* (Participant K).

Of interest, a line manager who also held cross college management responsibility around inclusion, presented a more varied experience of the consultation process on the progression exams.

*Quite early on so we had errmm… obviously the senior management team met initially with the divisional directors (DD) to do some problem solving and two of the DDs worked on how should this work…. once they had got an initial plan, they thrashed that out with senior management and then we had a curriculum board meeting where all the [Line Managers] sat around, they had given us papers in advance to read and said okay this is what we are thinking and people raised what particular issues they might have… there were lots of different pockets of people needing to do different things because of the nature of the specification, which was quite interesting, which is maybe why they didn't say right we are just going to have this blanket formula that everyone has to follow in some ways, but we were consulted there and I think we will probably be consulted, I think they will have a mop up, what worked, what didn't work, which I think will be quite an interesting meeting [laughs] later on... was there I suppose there was guidance in things like we got to choose what was on our papers and we had a sort of pro-forma that we had to fill in and we had to get our exam papers written and organised and signed off by the DDs* (Participant B).

Albeit they state there were opportunities for senior, middle, and line managers to discuss the variants of the progression exams, they believe there is no such requirement for line managers to consult with their teams and feedback.

> *No, not really, the* [Line Managers] *discussed it, obviously had to go back and tell our teams we have to write the progression papers, we need to make sure we are reasonably consistent in the level we are testing at…* (Participant B).

Furthermore, when asked whether they were consulted on matters relating to inclusion and progression exams, they stated that they were not brought into any of the discussions in relation to the impact on students.

> *No. When actually… to be fair our exam policy does look at quite a few [refers to area] things… but that is often to do with students with mental health needs, religious needs… if students have extra time in the real thing then they should have extra time, or if they have a PC or a scribe and [names member of staff] was very good at setting that up. But in terms of I think it was more that was agreed with student support rather than me which is fine because [names member of staff] is good at that sort of stuff. But it would have probably been useful to have a sort of overview, have we thought about this group of people or that group of people. Be quite interested to know how students with learning differences got on in the progression exams…* (Participant B).

In addition, a line and middle manager at the same college, supported the interpretation of the consultation process in their recounting of the progression exam consultation process:

> *Each department head were called to a meeting and various questions were asked of us to do with the summer exams and then, you see my* [names subject] *team would have a big say in lots of things because they are all very experienced, they all have strong opinions, so I would always go trotting back to them with questions that we have been asked and I would say what I said and they would say what they thought and I would feed that up as well.*

> *I don't know if that would happen in every department but our department tends to have a lot to say for itself about cross College matters* (Participant C).

Furthermore, clarification was sought from them on whether any guidance or protocol existed regarding how staff should be consulted for the progression exam policy:

> *I don't think for that there was* (Participant C).

Similar to the teacher and tutor's account (Participant I), they chose to exercise agency as a line manager and sought the opinions of their team. At no time during the discussion on the consultation process for progression exams did any of the participants state that there existed a consultation protocol that required line managers to confer with their teams and feedback to middle and senior management. Albeit it is important to acknowledge here that the sample of teachers, line and middle and senior managers were not selected on the basis of presenting a representative insight of the college, the opinions and experiences of the participants call into question the principal's (Participant N) perception of the 'blockage'. Interestingly, Boocock (2014) found similar examples of what he described as 'resistant' behaviours from some of the department managers in his research at one college. Boocock distinguished between line managers who chose to consult their teaching staff members and adapt college policy to suit the department's needs – Boocock described such behaviour as 'accommodated rationality' - those departments that chose to implement college policy directives from the SLT as is were described as 'embraced rationality' (Boocock, 2014).

The experiences of the participants from the same college presented in this thesis do not fit neatly into either the 'accommodated rationality' or the 'embraced rationality' categories. There is some level of micro and meso agency in their accounts regarding how each department will implement the progression exam policy to suit the requirements of the curriculum area. The operative word here however is 'implement'; the decision to run the progression exams did not appear to have been discussed, only how the policy will be implemented.

A middle manager had a key role in the progression exam policy. What is of particular interest is their assertion that 'because of the return of the linear A Levels we needed a progression exam'. It is not clear if the sentiment behind the statement is their own, or if the stance was a senior leadership one. However, they appear to be clear in their account of what they had been tasked to do.

> *A good example would be because of the return of linear A Levels we needed a progression exam and so myself and* [mentions another Director] *were tasked with coming up with a policy for progression exams. So* [Line Managers] *know what they should be doing as a progression exam, how they should be marked, standardised, so we kind of did the whole process. Came up with a practical process with the philosophy behind it… So we have to bear that in mind, we had to think what would be a good end of year exam for history wouldn't be the same as an end of year exam for say physics or biology, because they are just taught differently. That was a problem, because we thought if we come up with a one size fits all policy we will just create more problems… we had to choose our words carefully, so it would be things like saying, the exam you set at the end of the first year should be at an appropriate level of difficulty. If we say that, that gives* [Line Manager] *some wriggle room* (Participant H).

There appears to be some appreciation of the requirements of different curriculum areas, however the 'wriggle room' is arguably only as far as the implementation of the policy, not whether the progression exam policy should be introduced in the first place. In addition, following further questioning on the policy directive itself, they had this to say about the top down influence over the final version of the policy:

> *What happened… I must try not to sound bitter at this point. We did our documents* [and another Director) *we read each other's contribution, made a few changes and alike, talking to each other and submitted it to the deputy principal* (DP) *who didn't like it. And we had to redraft it and ended up redrafting it eight times… We stuck to our guns on a number of things. It was*

*pedantic stuff, often to do with wording, I mean okay when it is going to a wider audience I can accept that a bit, but there were times when I thought, if you are quibbling over a full stop why don't you make the change yourself* (Participant H).

In response to a question on who had the final say:

*The SLT. So what we did went to a group known as Operations Development, who discussed in detail what is whole college changes of policy, which in effect is what it was…(*Participant H).

There appears to be in the account by the middle manager (Participant H) some micro and meso level of agency over key policy directives, even if the agency was restricted to the implementation stages of policy. However, when asked whether they felt as a teacher they had opportunities to take part in policy consultations, they provided an example from the perspective of their middle manager position at the college.

*Yes, I do as I am part of a group called the curriculum development group, which has three divisional directors and the deputy principal and occasionally if they are needed other people come into it. I would say I have a 25% influence in what happens* (Participant H).

The percentage of influence stated is curious: they were not requested during the interview to share a percentage of influence, but in doing so it raises the question that if someone in middle management feels they only have 25% influence over policy directives, how much influence could a lay teacher have?

An opportunity did occur during the interview with the principal from the college where they used the progression policy, to ask whether they felt there were adequate opportunities for the staff body as a collective to contribute to the direction of the college.

*Is a really good question. I think any Principal worth his salt or her salt would be saying that is definitely what ought to be the case… but there is always a difference between intention and reality I think, so… there are formal*

*mechanisms in place where… I have worked really hard to try and get this right and I think it is something that is probably impossible to get right. The meetings pattern and structure that can be bottom up as well as top down we have seen some evidence of that, so it should be departments to divisional* [Line Managers] *to the senior team, so we have had some issues raised in that way.*

*We have got a strategic plan which needs updating next year, which clearly does focus on strategic issues, that will be introduced at a staff meeting, observations, and thoughts and feedback will be sought there, so to that extent then yes definitely… my intention next year partly to do with what we have just been discussing is to do two things really is to reintroduce I hope what use to be called staff committee which is an informal mechanism for a voluntary group of staff who aren't union reps to meet with either the deputy or the principal so that there is the opportunity to understand what lies behind decision making where that hasn't filtered down effectively. And I am also proposing that we introduce… that is ready to roll actually, but I am going to announce it in September, on the College portal, Staff portal a staff feedback button that will come directly to the senior team so that anybody is able to contribute any thoughts that they may have on whatever issue... For me that is more valuable than a staff survey where people tick boxes and that doesn't tell you very much, it is about how people feel, I would say though that in addition to that and this is something that I would always promote whenever I make an appoint neither [names member of staff and role] nor I will hide behind our office doors, so the door is open unless we are at a meeting, and people are free to drop in at a moment's notice, if that is not the case if we are not busy, and they do. Whether or not that's part of the culture that has seeped through the institution as a whole is probably not the case, but for a substantial proportion of the staff it is* (Participant N).

The response from the principal reads quite positively in terms of a desire to include lay teaching staff in the College direction. However, what is lacking is any clear mechanism for

teaching staff to engage in a formal way in the consultation process. The policy techniques of whole college staff meetings, drop-ins, and online feedback services rely on staff opting in: the onus is on the staff member to put themselves forward. It could be argued that such techniques should at best supplement a robust policy protocol. The meeting structure referenced by the principal would appear to be inconsistent by their own account and the account of the participants interviewed from the College. However, what is clear in the accounts provided is that there exists a nuanced and inconsistent process of policy consultation, with ultimate responsibility for the direction of the policy residing with the senior leadership team. Therefore, albeit the progression exam policy is only one example, it is clear in the accounts of the participants that Braun, *et al*. (2010) claim that teachers are 'key actors' in the policy cycle process appears to be, in this instance, unfounded. Furthermore, in accounts where teachers and managers are consulted their remit is restricted to the implementation of the policy; they appear not to be consulted on whether the direction of the policy is the right one in the first place.

In addition, participants from the second college recounted a similar position in terms of the micro and meso consultation process. The vice principal described the internal consultation process on changes to policy around teaching and learning:

> *Yeah, not on a regular basis but certainly when we review policy. Some of those working parties are open to all staff, some are open to managers, there is a mix, and obviously we have the Unions. We have also attempted to make programme meetings more discussions of and sharing good practice of teaching and learning... We have a managers meeting every Friday and there is an expectation that decisions that are made are fed back to staff. But there is an opportunity for that to be a two-way process as well, we will sometimes on a Friday morning say, okay we will discuss and take it back to your teams and we will get some feedback from them for next week* (Participant P).

Again there appears to be no formal process for teaching staff to be collectively consulted regarding changes to policy. An 'expectation' for line managers to consult with their teams is likely to result in an ad-hoc approach, with again the onus being on the line manager to make the decision on whether to consult or not. In pressing the matter further, the vice principal was asked whether teachers were included in consultation directives that had come from external agencies and departments such as, Ofsted or DfE.

> *So responding to that AoC document to be blunt is an SLT thing that we did. We are the senior leaders of the College and if we asked staff to contribute to every one of those things we got, no one would do any teaching. So there is a point when we say this is what we think. Once it becomes operational then we will start consulting with staff on how best we can do this etc. etc. But…and obviously we know what the managers think as something like T Levels come up on a Friday morning managers meeting. No one thinks radically different to us* (Participant P).

Of interest is the statement, 'once it becomes operational then we will start consulting with staff on how best can we do this'. In other words, when it is necessary to implement the policy we will consult staff. There is no data to corroborate their claim that staff do not think 'radically different', as no interviews were conducted with lay teachers at that particular college. However, the principal at the same college (Participant O), explained further the consultation process, illustrating with a policy directive of 'adding value' to the teaching and learning experience for both staff and students.

> *On the very last day of term which is our manager's conference, which was a really good opportunity for me to open up some ideas particularly around teaching and learning. Around the kind of, you know. So the theme for 17/18 was adding value and we interpreted that in lots of different ways. The manager's conference was an opportunity to explore what that might look like from the data driven value added, through to enrichment, how we enrich one another as staff, are students and so on…*

*And we sort of played around with that and came out with some sort of sub-themes if you like, and then they formed some working parties with a manager being the designated lead but then when we started back in August they then involved other staff in that. So there was some kind of consultation both in terms of people that were really interested in those ideas… There was a sort of cluster around that, some managers got involved, members of staff from a number of different departments got involved. But at the same time while that work was happening those discussions were also taking place in teams, so it was a sort of two pronged. And then that kind of fed in to proposals coming back to the management group and again we thrashed them around there and then came out with some specifics which then went back to staff…*

*So yeah, it is kind of, we have a good model here that [names ex member of staff] introduced when they arrived around these sort of working parties and that is kind of a good way of getting some good specific consultation and input around things that matter to specific individuals because people volunteer because they are interested in those issues, but you don't want just the interested parties driving an agenda and so that is why it is coupled with consultation and input within teams as well* (Participant O).

Albeit there is some reflection from the principal, at the end of their statement regarding selective viewpoints, the consultation process technique explained in the main would still be described as more informal than formal. However, it is worth noting at this juncture that participation in formal consultation does not necessarily ensure any greater influence over the final policy directive. Notwithstanding, it could be argued that the use of formal protocols and process transparency is likely to be greater, and senior management teams would be more certain about the range of those included in the consultation process.

It is in fact the vice principal who extends further the note of caution raised by the principal, regarding individuals driving a particular agenda. Albeit the 'agenda' implied in the vice principal's response was influenced by what the previous principal would have wanted to hear.

> *I mean* [refers to previous principal] *was very clever when he first came here, he set up a lot of working parties and so people felt… although I think there were very few working parties reported something that he didn't want to hear, but people were involved in the production of the policies, so you had the culture involvement, the culture of openness which then created policies which we have been able to continue the momentum of* (Participant P).

The principal (Participant O) states staff as a collective are consulted if external policy directives will lead to changes having to be made to internal practice. They describe the need to consult staff on the reintroduction of the Linear A Levels, but despite reference being made to consulting staff several times, there does not appear to be a clear protocol regarding how the consultation was sought.

> *If it was going to change our internal practice or if we needed to respond to that, then yes. What we would then do… there is an external agenda we can't change an external agenda, so for example the introduction of linear A Levels well there is nothing we can do to influence that as a policy, whatever we feel about it… So to take that example we consulted about the various delivery models… So you know, what would be the right approach for us, we presented the various options to staff, we talked through the advantages and disadvantages of each model and we reached a majority decision through all of that consultation that in the first year we would enter all of our students for the standalone AS, and then we listened to the staff that were directly involved in doing that, and the majority of them said it was a nightmare let's never do this again and so we made the decision to not continue to do that. So that was something where we could do nothing to change the policy decision but we could think about how we implemented it here. And yes so there is consultation on those things* (Participant O).

The sentiment expressed in the opening paragraph on the inability to influence policy directives is echoed in the responses from both middle and senior participants across both colleges. Exception is taken in particular to the lack of consultation on the philosophy behind a policy change, with the overwhelming feeling that consultation is limited to practical/operational responsibilities of implementation rather than policy direction. Paradoxically, it could be argued that the same policy technique was evident in the micro and meso consultation process at both the FE colleges. By their own accounts, and the accounts of some of the staff body, the internal consultation process appears to be limited to matters relating to implementation only.

In this sub-heading, the accounts of participants from the two colleges provides a snapshot of the policy consultation process at both micro and meso level. Interestingly, there appeared to be parallels in the policy techniques adopted by both the colleges, in as much as they restricted contributions to the consultation process to a more informal process, which included non-mandatory meetings and staff conferences. In addition, opportunities to contribute to the consultation process centred on the implementation of a policy decision; a technique also adopted by wider FE organisations, agencies and departments.

In the next sub-heading the policy process of the formal consultation process will be explored, with the purpose of identifying similar and additional policy techniques. However, before further exploration, it is necessary to return to Braun, *et al*. (2010) claim that teachers are key policy actors. The notion of a 'key' policy actor is a difficult one, as firstly it is necessary to define what is meant by the term 'key'. If 'key' is determined by any form of interpretation of policy, then to some degree, teachers could be described as 'key'. However, 'key' in the common sense of the word, is normally associated with something of great influence on a person or thing; often the person plays a fundamental role in the introduction or change of something. In considering the accounts of the participants from the two colleges, it would be difficult to support the claim that lay teachers held great influence over the policies introduced in the two colleges included in this inquiry. In particular, due to the absence in either college of a formal protocol for all teachers to be consulted, it could be argued there is a high probability that the majority of teachers do not

contribute directly to either internal or external policy directives. In turning now to the FE sector organisations the exploration of the micro and meso levels of agency will be extended with the purpose of understanding the wider sectors contribution to the policy process. This is in order to uncover whether the FE sector organisations, agencies and departments, have greater participation in the creation of policy, and to understand better the modes in which they contribute to the consultation process.

## 7.4 Formal consultation process: FE sector organisations

In discussing the formal policy process participants referred to the same two examples: the A Level reform and the introduction of the T Levels. A principal explained the formal consultation process on the reintroduction of the Linear A Levels by the DfE:

> *They did a number of institutional visits, at the college I was at prior to this one we hosted a visit so they did come and they did talk about potential impact of linear, and there were consultation documents that, through the AoC and the SFCA. Who I think responded… I can't remember exactly, I think they collated the individual responses from colleges but it wasn't do you think this is a good idea, it was much more about whether or not you would… it was about the co teachability of the AS and the full A Level, the structural decisions and the impact, how would it alter your study programmes in terms of three A Levels, four A Levels etc, etc. It was much more about the detail of the implementation rather than philosophically do you think linear A Levels are a good idea, because Gove's agenda was so clear that was the direction of travel* (Participant O).

In addition, they go on to criticise OFQUAL regarding their perception that OFQUAL failed to consult on the actual content of the curriculum.

> *And yeah the other frustration about the linear A Levels was the lack of consultation around the actual content of the curriculum but of course that was OFQUAL* (Participant O).

Similar sentiments were expressed by another principal. However, their experience of the consultation process differed slightly due to their privileged position of being a regional principal representative for one of the large membership organisations. Albeit, they stated it led to no advantage during the formal consultation period.

> *Okay with that specific stuff, because that was nationally driven and ministerial driven there was probably a heads up about direction of travel before it happened, but actually the consultation process was a formal one which we followed like everybody else* (Participant N).

In addition, they were critical of the government's response to the formal consultation feedback:

> *So a consultation document* [Linear A Levels] *that we responded to that the government as usual blithely ignored…* (Participant N).

However, they stated that as the membership organisation had, as they perceived it, a direct line at ministerial level, they had benefitted from the understanding and experiences the membership organisation held, and the 'heads up' of the direction of travel before it happened.

> *The real benefit of the council stuff though is that because they have direct communication at ministerial level they will have an understanding of what government thinking is on key issues, so A for example would be we are working quite closely with DfE ahead of next year's spending review on post 16 funding which has been an issue for some goodly time now and that is the work that the [names organisation] has done and the work that we have all done in terms of lobbying and all the rest of it. The fruits of that we are seeing now in the cases made with DfE and it is now about convincing the treasury. So all the way along the line we have been kept informed about progress and what needs to happen next, so it is quite a helpful early warning system for us to be able to think carefully about what is around the corner* (Participant N).

Of interest is the distinction made between the policy techniques of formal and informal consultation. They go on to provide an example of informal lobbying, led by the membership

organisation; the success of which they believe is down to the chief executive of the membership organisation placing direct pressure on the DfE to respond.

> *So there are examples of where lobbying and pressure without the formal consultation has had an impact, so that one for example would be, because we have moved to a two year linear curriculum as far as A Level is concerned, that is obviously means that students are now enrolled on one two year study program and not two one year study programmes. Funding is partly determined by retention that is a factor in the funding methodology and quite clearly there was a real risk because there is always a loss students in movement at the end of year 12… so the pressure that was applied therefore resulted in a relaxation of that and so long as they were still on roll as of last Friday they are retained for year 1 for the time being. So that was absolutely… council directing the chief executive of the [membership organisation], the gravity of the situation and them responding as a membership organisation by putting pressure on DfE* (Participant N).

The other members of senior management interviewed from both colleges did not hold a similar position with any of the membership organisations, making the above principal's situation a unique one.

In addition, participants were asked whether they were aware of the consultation process that existed within the colleges they represented. Subsequently, they were asked if there was an expectation that principals and other members of the senior leadership team would consult their staff body before contributing to both formal and informal consultation streams.

A senior policy manager, had this to say:

> *That depends on the principal in the institution doesn't it as to what methods they use to feedback and there are some areas where government consult in various different ways with various different bodies, so sometimes they*

> *consult through unions and through other bodies, so that differs depending on the principal, but it also differs depending on how government are consulting as well, because often UCU and Unison and other unions will also put in their own submissions for consultation as well, so they get their voice heard through the consultation process…*
>
> *We run policy groups typically with Principals but actually in every region we run a range of networks as well and so that information goes out across the management tiers and structures and get more of the important detail out across the different levels within the structures. In terms of consulting everybody within the teaching workforce, I am trying to think through what you are saying about doing what is best for everybody, you know and teachers included… We test it enough at lower levels with all the other test points with colleges, but in terms of teachers it is a huge workforce isn't it* (Participant E).

In addition, another senior policy manager (Participant Q) refers to Unions; it could be argued that both the accounts imply that teachers are represented by Unions in the consultation process.

> *...it is down to the individual institution what works best for them… and I think there are issues sometimes the Unions can have a view on things like lesson observations and learning walks and all this sort of stuff and so some colleges are slightly constrained by local agreements with Unions about what is and isn't acceptable. But ultimately no, on something like that different colleges do it different ways and it is up to them and whatever they think is best… however as an organisation we don't represent principals, we represent institutions not individuals, so with things like policy changes we have three policy committees* [lists committees] (Participant Q).

Interestingly, when probed they discuss quite candidly their uncertainty as to whom principals are representing during informal and formal discussions in their regional representative role:

> *…now it is a bit like being an MP is that principal representing… does he go out and consult all the other colleges in that [names process], or is he speaking as the principal of a particular college and whatever and we have never really nailed that down… the honest answer is it depends, so I think even at that level before you even get into staff engagement, even other principal engagement is different depending on where you are…* (Participant Q).

This admission opens up a whole separate branching of the consultation process regarding whom is consulted. The situation continues to be a complex one throughout the accounts provided by the participants from the FE sector.

The data gathered from FE sector participants illustrates the complexity of the key policy actor debate. Accounts from the membership organisation participants refer to both informal and formal processes, however there is evidence of influential relationships. Albeit these relationships reside more within the informal process, nonetheless it is possible that the outcomes of informal discussions may have shaped formal policy directives.

The national role manager expressed frustration at the formal consultation process, describing the process as a 'closed' one and a 'thankless task':

> *… so over the years, I kind of feel it is a bit of a thankless task and not really sure where our response goes, but we have responded to this governments consultations around the positive disability agenda, we are pretty cynical about that. I can't remember what the paper was about… getting more disabled people into work and throughout the whole consultation there was not one mention of reasonable adjustments to enable people to participate in work, or the additional costs that may come with employing someone with a disability, so it kind of felt a fairly shallow approach. We always you know*

*tend to respond, you know we need to do that, we have also over the years met mainly* (Participant L).

Of interest is the implicit purpose of the consultation; it appears not to be concerned with checking if the policy direction is right in the first place, rather it focuses on the implementation of the policy. They go on to disclose an informal consultation example where through a meeting with the Shadow Minister for Disability they hoped to push the positive disability agenda. In addition, they state that they believed the Shadow Minister would be more supportive: they held a perception that the current Labour party would provide the necessary space for them to have a day in parliament dedicated to disability history. It could be argued that although they believe the organisation they represented held no meso influence over the formal consultation process, they were still able to circumvent the formal system and push the disability agenda through an alternative technique, via a direct line to the Shadow Minister.

*… in a couple of weeks we are meeting the shadow minister for disability because we are wanting to do a day action around disability around disability history month this year and we feel that the current labour party will support that and provide some parliamentary space for us to have the day* (Participant L).

Furthermore, the reference to an 'open' and 'closed' consultation process is expressed:

*Well these current consultations on all issues are very closed so they are very specific questions so often it is a yes or a no. And often they exclude the issues that we want to raise, they are quite clever in a way, but also seem a bit of a tick box exercise, so you know you have to try and crowbar your issues into areas that it is not really asking you that, but we just feel we need to do it* (Participant L).

A senior policy manager also picks up on the notion of an 'open' and 'closed' consultation process:

*But it is dependent on how the policy document has been framed and written in the first place, there are some policy documents that you read where it is*

*just written in a way that can only be answered in a positive frame, or it is asking the wrong questions… But in the policy document like the T Level one was much more open in its nature then you can answer it in an open way, so it depends on the framing of the narrative… but I think when it comes to consultations, you have got to look at the area and look at where they have written the consultation in a way that is truly open or not, so the consultations are sometimes one question… Or were asking completely the wrong questions, so it results in a consultation needing to ask the right questions in the first place… So I think it is dependent on the policy area and the questions in the consultation process at the time* (Participant E).

In both accounts they refer to policy techniques that either restrict or prohibit responses. In addition, what could be argued, although implicitly referred to here, is a third macro level of policy influence in the form of political discourse. The description of the policy process by the senior policy manager is a truly nuanced one: it appears to be by their account not a fixed process but more of a fluid one. To add to the complexity the fluidity appears to exist even when decisions are made by successive ministers from the same term of government.

The senior policy manager (Participant E) goes on to describe the current Conservative government as in a 'co-creative' mode in terms of the 'open' T Level formal consultation process, led by Justine Greening, Secretary of State for Education (at the time), under a Conservative government. This differs to the experience of the A Level reform consultation under Michael Gove, previous Secretary of State for education under the same Conservative term of government.

*It is probably more open if you take the T Level consultation and read just the language and the way the questions are phrased. And then go back a few years you will see a different language and framing, more open questions, they don't seem loaded I think it is a genuine open consultation. I think the problem is that previously… So I do hope with this reform, while we agree with the direction of travel it is the implementation that will really, really*

*matter and therefore they have to listen and be open to it more with this reform as an example. I think it is something you can measure, you can measure it in the language used and the way they framed the questions* (Participant E).

Both the senior policy managers, in their recounting of the consultation process with government departments, describe a situation where they felt the organisation they represented had greater influence over the informal stages of policy formation, rather than once the policy directive had been finalised.

One of the senior policy managers had this to say about what they described as the 'middle' position in the informal consultation process:

*I think there is an interesting question there about how policy is developed and formulated, to what extent does it come from the top down and to what extent does it come from the bottom up. And we are not at the top or the bottom we are in the middle, so we are representing our [type of organisation] and so it is a combination of the two to be honest, we regularly meet… let's take Ofsted as an example and we will feed into them what is happening on the ground and the views of colleges on inspection practice and equally we can get information from them to feed to our [type of organisation]… so that we can say to our [type of organisation] look this is coming down the line and we can feed up to them this is what is happening on the ground. And that practice feeds into the policy making process, because yeah in an informal way they will have discussions about it but in terms of how they do it they will issue a formal consultation to which we have to respond and our [type of organisation] have to respond* (Participant Q).

The other senior policy manager echoed the response in the positioning of a reciprocal relationship between the membership organisations and government departments and agencies:

> *It works in both ways if they are developing something new then they will get in contact with us to sound us out first or vice versa. If our members are calling for things and we go to them and say this isn't right and you need to fix this. Sometimes those things are very well aligned and sometimes they are not, in terms of timing but we tend to have quite a grown up relationship with government, we challenge them but you know we have to work with them to get the best deal for colleges, for teachers, for students, for employers, for everyone, so we tend to try and be objective and as moderate as we possibly can be… So it depends on the policy as to how that then gets developed, but prior to consultation either if we are saying something or if government see something is coming either from research or from the minister or from employers we then get sounded out, consultation goes out and then we respond to it along with other people* (Participant E).

A former senior policy manager at a large membership organisation, describes a situation where the informal stage of the consultation process began with a directive and the informal discussions were about the sort of questions that should be asked.

> *Yeah, so BIS would've drafted a consultation document that would've normally started with a policy directive which sort of said, we want to make a decision on X but we don't really know whether we are asking the right questions and we don't really know whether we want to do this or not, so we are going to ask this series of questions both quantitative and qualitative to form a view, or to form another set of questions which we will then consult on and that will either be a yes/no answer and we will make a decision whether it is yes/no, or it will form a number of recommendations…* (Participant G).

They go on to further explain why they believed government departments and agencies sought the membership organisations counsel on how to shape policy for the formal consultation process.

> *I think you need to remember I worked for a representative lobbying organisation essentially and we would have had a lot of stakeholder relationships already within those departments and as experts particularly for further education when government were consulting on particular policy things around FE, they would come to us and say we are thinking about this and what do you think, we would have an opportunity privately, not publically to help shape that and that was why we had 95% [names organisation] membership because we had those actual relationships… that is how lobbying organisations work* (Participant G).

When asked whether they saw evidence of the informal consultation discussions in the final policy. They stated:

> *I think it was variable. For me in particular because I was just responsible for workforce and employment related policy, I would say less so on things that weren't specific to the FE sector… If it were something that was FE specific, so if the skills and funding agency, I think it is still called that, the education funding agency, whatever it is called. If they are consulting on something which is specific to the sector I would expect that our voice would come out in those recommendations. Because we are the main representative body for that. It would be pretty damming to their reputation if you didn't see their [membership organisation] stamp somewhere* (Participant G).

In support of the assumption, a senior policy manager responded in the positive, stating they believed the membership organisation had the opportunity to contribute to the final policy directive. However, they did expand on the response and returned to the policy technique of whether the consultation document was written in an 'open' way.

> *Yes I think there is plenty of opportunity but I don't think that is just us, I think it includes other people and organisations as well… But it is dependent on*

> *how the policy document has been framed and written in the first place, there are some policy documents that you read where it is just written in a way that can only be answered in a positive frame, or it is asking the wrong questions…* (Participant E).

They go on to make a philosophical point about the notion of democracy in as much as attention should be paid to who leads on the consultation, assuming they are referring to by what organisation or government department, and where it is written.

> *In terms of like a truly democratic process we have a minister in charge of departments and it is democratic in terms of we have voted them into their positon but then not every decision is broken down into a truly democratic act is it, but I think when it comes to consultations, you have got to look at the area and look at where they have written the consultation in a way that is truly open or not…* (Participant E).

So far in this sub-heading the accounts by the former senior policy manager, and the current senior policy managers, suggest that membership organisations do have a level of influence over the formation of a policy directive at the informal stage. Once the consultation becomes a formal one the process reads as if it is much the same as the experience of senior leadership managers from the two colleges. However, the account from a former policy officer at a government department, paints a more complex picture.

In the next sub-heading, the former policy officer's experience of the consultation process will expose a more contrived and complex process in the policy consultation cycle. In particular, the existence of a fluid level to the policy process: one in which the micro agency of one individual is positioned as having greater influence over policy directives than the meso agency of the entire FE sector.

## 7.5 ‘Key informers’ and ‘Key influencers’ in the policy process

Of interest, and particularly intriguing, were the accounts by both the former policy officer and the senior policy manager (Participant Q) in their expressions on the context in which policy is created. The senior policy manager in response to a question on the policy consultation process, described those who create it as being from a socio-economic ‘clique or elite’. More importantly, they refer to the locking down of ideas early, which they then go on to state is ‘unhealthy’, however, they appear to accept the technique by exclaiming ‘this is how it works’. What is not clear is whether not challenging the ‘this is how it works’ status quo is a micro decision by them, or a fatalistic statement in relation to the limited agency at the meso level of the membership organisation.

> *… what interests me working here in [names location], in the heart of [names location] is that you look around and see where policy comes from and it comes from a very small number of organisations… so what you have is a kind of policy making clique or elite who are often from the same socio-economic background and they are in and out of government and in and out of these think tanks as well so actually the most important thing which is the ideas stage that’s captured and locked down quite early on by a small group of people… that I think is unhealthy, but it is how it works* (Participant Q).

In addition, the former policy officer shares some interesting insights into the policy process at government department meso level, portraying a complex and multi layered picture of the hierarchal structure at government department level:

> *…there are a number of times having been outside and inside the department in those meetings you know as the external person sometimes you would think, well I have talked to the [government] department so my voice is being heard but the other thing is there is multiple layers of hierarchy in the department, so you have got the minister and then you have got the*

*permanent secretary and then you have got the director generals, directors and the deputy directors and you know the heads of units, then the assistant directors and team leaders, so that is about seven or eight different ranks or grades…* (Participant R).

They go on to share the hierarchal structure within government departments with the additional caveat that if the policy position/request is not in-line with what the government department minister considers to be important, it is unlikely to make it up the chain of command.

*If you go into the department you are probably meeting with someone who is like quite a junior member of staff because they are the people that have the time that is available to you… how well does that get passed up the chain, of all of those different levels without someone going, do you know what but this isn't aligned with what our minister wants to do so it is not going to get any further, because each of those levels there is like a gatekeeper to the next on, so unless you are meeting with someone fairly high up like a deputy director or above, then the chances are that it is more about maintaining the relationship, keeping people happy then necessarily we definitely need to know what you want and we are going to act on it* (Participant R).

Interestingly, in their account both a formal and informal process, but then states there is a consultation phase that neither sits within the formal nor informal process:

*… so I think in terms of consultation you have got the formal stuff, you've got the sort of testing the water, you've got these kind of maintaining the relationships with stakeholders but there is this question of how much of that opinion is making any difference in the way policy is shaped, and then you have got the personal contacts as well so the minister obviously is a social being, they will have their own contacts they will have the people they like to talk to, the people they like to work with because they know they are aligned, people like to sit down and talk to people that share their ideas, that share their philosophy, you don't like to sit down with someone who has a complete different philosophy because you just argue with them and go*

*there is no point talking to you anymore, so those are the key opinion formers as well* (Participant R).

They go on to explain how, at the micro level, the 'opinion formers' in their privileged position of having a direct line to the minister get an opportunity to shape policy.

> *… that is where a minister will go to, to test their ideas and it will be phone calls and personal meetings in their offices where they will say so I am talking about this, does that sound about right and then that person will say yeah I think that is right because here's how you can develop that idea further. That's one of the key areas where policy is formed and then that will get filtered down so the minister will then have meetings with their senior civil servants and say this is what I want to do enact it and then that of course will get passed down to the teams who then have to implement that…*
>
> *…those informal personal contacts at the top of the hierarchy just don't fit into any of those [formal or informal consultation] structures so the minister's personal advisor meeting with the CEO of an organisation that he happens to be friends with and you know those are the conversations where policy is really defined at that sort of level… that's how influence happens within government* (Participant R).

They add a further caveat to the consultation process, by stating that with the rise of social media a new type of micro influencer arose.

> *…most recently in the last seven to eight years social media has actually had quite a big part to play in this… most ministers don't sit there tweeting their random thoughts… they get people close to them to monitor social media very closely, so you're the special advisor, you're the policy advisor actually you have your own team of assistants and a large part of what they do is to monitor social media.*
>
> *They will identify from that, the people they would call the key influencers, the people with the large groups of followers, the people with tens of*

> *thousands of followers who are perhaps teachers in their own right but also bloggers, writers and consultants and things like that and they will say ah here is someone who aligns with my philosophy who seems to be promoting my agenda… those are the people that will be brought in to say it would be really helpful if you could advise us on this because not only do they have that sense of you have got an insight from the frontline but then you have got someone out there who is saying no actually the government's policies on this are really, really good and strong and here is why I agree with them, they are publishing blogs back, they are essentially providing you with a free service, what they get out of it is a sense of I have access to a minister.. individuals are often head teachers, they are people who are quite keen to promote their school, to promote themselves so they will be writing blogs, they will be tweeting, they will be doing all of those sorts of things and that will be picked up by the government saying these are key people that we can make use to help refine our policies but also to help promote our policies as well so it is a two way street* (Participant R).

Much like the relationships between the membership organisations and government departments and agencies, they describing a reciprocal relationship between the minister and the 'key influencers' around the notion of exposure. However, 'key influencers' and to some extent the social contacts described as 'key informers' operate outside of the formal consultation process, and on a micro level. More challenging is the likelihood of flux, particularly in regards to the 'key influencers'; social media is a notoriously fickle forum where popularity can wane as quickly as it can rise. Moreover, what is particularly disconcerting, if their account reflects current practice, is the omission of any accountability by the 'key influencers' and 'key informers' to the policy directive they may have contributed to.

In addition, the matter of who contributes to policy directives and implementation has been approached from both a 'top down' and 'bottom up' position. Also, consideration has been paid to the consultative relationship between relevant membership organisations and government

departments and agencies. Albeit, the reality of the consultative process documented is less inclusive than the collective rhetoric espoused by the colleges and membership organisations, what is clear is the intention to include as many voices in the consultative process as is sensible. However, the intentions of the 'key influencers' and 'key informers' are more difficult to fathom; although it could be assumed that a head teacher as a 'key influencer' may be representing the school or college they lead, it is just as likely that they could be merely representing themselves and feeding their own ambitions. 'Key informers' are even more of an enigma; their reasons for contributing are almost impossible to predict, made more difficult by the reality that they could be anyone with multiple agendas.

## 7.6 Summary

In summary of Chapter 7, the continued responsibility of student success in the form of measurable outputs, such as summative grades and positive variance on Value Added scores, was placed at the micro level of individual teachers. All policy actors interviewed, including those that taught, perpetuated a 'cult' figure of how a teacher should perform. Instead, the 'cult figure of the performative teacher' created by policy and policy techniques, both at the college meso level and the FE sector meso level, went unchallenged and continued to be embraced, albeit with some tension. Teachers are ultimately responsible for performance; results are scrutinised. Teachers aspire to a 'cult' representation of what a 'good' or 'outstanding' teacher is. The perversity of the 'cult' figure is pronounced in the accounts of both the teachers whom declared their SpLD status, who believe they are in some way deficient due to their neurodiverse status as a dyslexic person. They experience a dual burden: firstly to overcome their belief of their incapability compared to their peers; and secondly in adapting their neurodiverse ways of thinking into neuro-typical standards so they can achieve the expectation of the 'cult' figure of the performative teacher.

Furthermore, the introduction of the A Level reform, the brainchild of Gove created for the FE sector, presents particular challenges around the implementation of the policy. Interestingly, the policy process surrounding the introduction of the A Level reform, and the techniques employed

by the DfE in the soliciting of feedback, could be described as bilaterally symmetrical to the policy process and techniques adopted by the two FE colleges considered in this research. Similar to the DfE, participants from the two colleges' senior management chose to consult staff on matters of implementation only when it came to changes as a result of the A Level reform. Although there is some evidence in the accounts by participants that micro and meso agency is asserted. There is an undercurrent, particularly in the response from one of the senior policy managers (Participant Q) in the normalisation process of accepting the inevitable. What is absent in the responses from the participants is the possible subjectification of those at the coal face, in particular teachers, who will bear a sizable burden in the implementation of the policy changes to the qualification structure in their everyday teaching practice. Moreover, as documented in the literature and in the accounts of the participants in this thesis, teachers are portrayed as a homogenous whole. Albeit it is likely that all teachers in FE colleges will have adopted resilience techniques in order to assimilate changes to the qualifications, teachers with SpLDs, if not considered, may be subject to further strain if their particular adjustments are not considered in the planning of the implementation.

As with the point made above regarding the implementation of policy, this thesis argues there is further bilateral symmetry between how FE colleges operate and the FE sector government departments operate. It could be argued that the macro position of distrust legitimises the continuation of accountability measures and the justification for the performative techniques of lesson observations, such as Value Added measures, comparative analysis, and the perpetuation of the 'cult of the performative teacher'.

# Chapter 8: Conclusion

## 8.1. Introduction

The aim of this thesis was to explore the contribution of policy techniques, policy process and performativity in the construction of teachers with SpLDs as subjects in the English FE sector. This research inquiry moves beyond subjective accounts of how teachers with SpLD navigate through the expectations of what it is to be a teaching professional, and instead appreciates how a set of circumstances created by FE sector policy reform and policy techniques contributes to the subjectification of teachers with SpLDs.

In order to explore the first research objective (RO1) 'To analyse the benefits and purposes of policy techniques, policy process and performativity in the construction of teachers with specific learning differences as subjects, according to policy actors in the English Further Education sector', a sample of fifteen policy actor participants were selected from the FE sector, including two colleges, FE organisations, agencies and departments. Throughout, in reference to RO1, the benefits and purposes of the conceptualisations are drawn out, explored and critiqued alongside the existing literature. Sustained throughout the data analysis chapters is the methodology of drawing on the policy cycle process in understanding policy in practice (Bowe *et al*., 1992; Braun *et al*., 2010). The policy cycle process is extended in particular by appreciating the micro and meso levels which underpin the policy processes, policy techniques and performativity. In order to appreciate the micro, meso and macro nuances it was necessary to include a broad sample population that extended the notion of the concept of policy actor to include all those that operate within the FE sector. The sample of participants were selected based on their identity as policy actors in the FE sector, and not on the basis of them identifying as having a SpLD, nor on their expertise of SpLDs. Moreover, this thesis deliberately avoids the temptation to reduce the teacher with SpLDs to their neurodiverse status by only focusing on their subjective experiences as a teacher with SpLDs.

In reference to the second research objective (RO2) 'To identify the policy techniques and processes in place for policy actors in the English Further Education sector to contribute to the policy consultation process, and how these contribute to the construction of teachers with specific learning differences as subjects', it was necessary to identify how the policy processes, policy techniques and performativity construct subjectification at the micro individual level of the teacher with SpLD. In doing so, the micro, meso, and macro levels of agency, and the policy consultation process were explored.

The aim of the three data analysis and discussion chapters (5, 6 and 7), was to explore the perceptions of policy actors in the FE sector, their thoughts on the benefits and purposes of performative driven policy, whether they believe they contribute to the direction and implementation of policy, and to explore the policy techniques they are exposed to, and have to navigate through. The teacher with SpLDs as a policy actor is orientated within the same policy environ as all policy actors from the FE sector. However, the contribution of how policy techniques, policy process and performativity construct teachers with SpLDs as subjects provides an extra dimension to the existing literature, by drawing attention to the sector.

The first finding, the *Cult of the Performative Teacher,* draws to attention the preoccupation in the FE sector with the performative ideal of an FE teaching professional, creating a cult figure. Furthermore, the cult figure is a symptom of the second finding, *Post-panoptic performativity,* in as much as the discourse of performativity has created a process in which the cult is perpetuated and taken-for-granted. Furthermore, all those that work and operate within the FE sector are complicit, albeit not consciously in the stimulation of the cult figure. In reference to the third finding, *Prove or improve Techniques,* the technique does not deliver the liberation it appears to promise but aids the continuation of performativity, and reinforces the construction of the cult figure.

The chapter will start with a concise account of the three findings, before presenting the contribution and originality of the research. The implications for future research in light of the research findings are stated. Future research recommendations in the subject matter of teachers with SpLDs, policy actors and the policy consultation process, and the policy consultation process are shared. The chapter will conclude with an evaluation of the methodology.

### *8.2.1 Cult of the Performative Teacher*

The first finding argues the preoccupation in the FE sector with the performative ideal of an FE teaching professional creates a cult figure. The cult is a symptom of the process of post-panoptic performativity (Perryman *et al*., 2018) and is embodied in the everyday resilience techniques adopted by policy actors, in order for them to manage the implementation of performative policy at both the micro and meso levels of practice. Participants provided 'stimulated' responses in their reeling off of the performative expectations of the lesson observation technique. The Ofsted inspection framework was normalised by all policy actor participants, albeit some concerns were raised about increased workloads, and the constant flux of the sector, the implicit solution manifested itself in the adaptation and introduction of further resilience strategies by teachers and managers in the FE colleges.

Policy actors, in their recounting of the Linear A Level policy, acknowledged their position in the policy process as implementors with the responsibility of managing the implementation predominately falling to those responsible for policy at the college meso level (Ball, *et al*., 2011; Braun *et al*., 2010). This thesis argues that the cult discourse underpinned the progression exam policy introduced by one of the FE colleges as a response to the return of Linear A Levels. Notwithstanding, departments had some meso agency over how they formatted the exam. At the micro level of the individual teacher, they were considered as a homogenous whole, evident in the expectation that all teachers would be able to mark in a single day. Of note, how long it actually took for the teachers to mark is unknown as this information was not

solicited from participants. However, what appeared is that the cult is a symptom of wider post-panoptic performativity discourse, one in which a stimulated response is expected in the form of techniques of resilience to ensure targets are met. The construction of the cult figure through policy processes and policy techniques, such as the progression exam, creates a vulnerable and subjectified situation for all teachers. Nevertheless, for teachers with SpLDs their subjectification is bilaterally layered: they are assimilated within an environ that does not recognise in policy or practice the existence of neurodiversity in the FE sector workforce. Instead, a bio-medical model discourse prevails in the expectation that teachers with SpLDs will adopt the necessary resilience strategies to act and process in a neuro-typical way. Furthermore, the additional layer of subjectification manifests in the further adaptation of resilience techniques, exercised in order to meet the cult figure of the performative teacher created through policy and policy techniques.

### *8.2.2 Post-panoptic performativity*

The second finding argues the discourse of performativity has created a process in which the cult is perpetuated and taken-for-granted. This finding develops somewhat on the work of Perryman *et a*l. (2018) by arguing the stimulant of performative discourse is as normative for the FE sector policy actors as it is for teachers and managers who work within FE colleges. Participants from the membership organisations, the senior leadership teams and government organisations all demonstrated a conviction and drive that was concerned with delivering the very best experience for students. There was a real serenity in their responses and a firmness in their belief that the quality assurance measures and techniques put in place were done so for the benefit of students and not as some stick to beat teachers with. They were not jaded or cynical; when one of the membership organisation participants, Participant Q, asked ‘what do we do if we don’t measure?’ This implied that they had full confidence in the measures, partly because the results could be monitored and compared, and therefore stood up to scrutiny.

Similar to the policy actor participants from the two FE colleges, the FE organisations, agencies and departmental agency were limited at both the micro and meso level of policy to the implementation of policy, rather than the direction of policy. Furthermore, FE sector participants expressed cautions around the use of accountability measures, the usefulness of applying national standards of measurement, and in the use of comparisons at the micro level between teachers and the meso level between institutions. This thesis argues that the preoccupation with comparisons at both the micro and meso levels described above aids and benefits the maintenance of the performative status quo, and relinquishes the responsibility for government and government agencies such as Ofsted to invest in more contextual strategies to address underperformance. In addition, in reference to *et al's* (2018) research on post-panoptic performativity, it would appear that the participants had taken an active decision in normalising the process of comparison, even though they knew it to be flawed and an invalid technique. This thesis argues the post-panoptic performative environ affects the micro, meso and macro levels of the FE sector; the normalising techniques adopted by all policy actors who operate in the sector reinforce the cult of performativity and therefore are instrumental in reinforcing and replicating the *cult of the performative teacher*. Thus, all policy actors are subjugated to the discourse and demands of a FE sector blighted by a systemic performative culture.

### *8.2.3 Prove or Improve Techniques*

The third finding argues prove and improve techniques do not deliver liberation, but instead aid the continuation of performativity. This thesis argues that techniques of improvement in the guise of Value Added measures and CPD activities are little more than reformulated techniques of proof. It is the morphing of improve and prove techniques that legitimises and maintains the performative status quo. As stated in Chapter 6, it is difficult to fathom how assessing students using an artificial progression exam structure would aid their development, or tangibly enable them to improve for the summative exam. Furthermore, as one the middle managers (Participant C) stated, the SLT team mandated, the current grade which the progression exam grade contributed to, could not be lower than the predicted grade, based on GCSE results, as it would be sent out to parents. This has the effect of further compounding the conflation between

initiatives instigated under the notion of improvement, falling short of being no more than a way to 'prove' and make teachers accountable to some semblance of progress (Ball, 2003; 2013; O'Leary, 2013). The series of proof techniques is normalised at both the micro and meso level of the FE sector; it is these techniques that create and sustain the *cult of the performative teacher*. It is the techniques of proof which stimulate the post-panoptic performative FE sector to adjust and create resilience techniques, with the promise that tangible improvements are possible as long as the sector ignores contextual differences, such as 'inclusive' and 'exclusive' institutions, and internalises accountability at both the micro and meso levels.

## 8.3 Contribution and Originality

The contribution to knowledge of this thesis is twofold. Firstly, it moves beyond the subjective micro experiences of individual teachers with SpLDs (Riddick, 2003; Riddick & English, 2009; Macleod & Cebula, 2009). Instead, the first contribution is to policy research theory, by situating the teacher with SpLDs into the continuous policy cycle process put forth by Bowe *et al*. (1992). This thesis approaches the exploration of the construction of teachers with SpLDs in the English FE sector from the perspective of considering them as a policy actor, and refrains from reducing the affected teacher to their SpLD status, therefore avoiding the 'othering' process of focusing on individual experiences. Furthermore, originality is evident in the enquiry from the perspective of exploring, in particular, the micro and meso contexts in which policy, policy techniques and performativity reside and subjectify policy actors who work within the FE sector.

Secondly, the research explored the practice of policy according to the policy actors who work and operate within the FE sector. Furthermore, it was important to contribute to the existing corpus of research by including a greater breadth of policy actors from within the FE sector. Previous research had tended to separate policy actors from teachers; teachers were described as 'practitioners' and not included in policy actor sample populations (Edward & Coffield, 2007; Hodgson *et al*., 2008). In addition, the 'State/managerial' model of policy tended to represent teachers and managers in education as having limited agency when it came to policy enactment (Boocock, 2014; Dale, 1989; Hodgson *et al*., 2008).

## 8.4 Evaluation of methodology

The interpretivist nature of the research afforded me the opportunity to use my biography to assist in the techniques and tools I chose to adopt in the data analysis stage of the research. My own experience as a teacher with SpLDs provided me with an insider view in terms of what it is like to navigate through the performative expectations of teaching in the FE sector. Albeit, before completing this research I did not associate the language of 'techniques' nor indeed 'policy' to my own experience as a teacher. Interestingly, as a policy actor if I had of been asked to participate in research on education policy it is likely I would have responded in a similar way to some of the participants in this research, presenting policy as something that is 'done to' teachers; a view that is reflected in the 'managerial perspective' of policy (Dale, 1989).

As discussed in Chapter 4 my status as a policy actor with SpLDs created a context in which my own experience guided and informed the research methodology adopted. Although this thesis appreciates the criticisms and concerns from researchers who favour a positivist approach (Baskarada & Koronios, 2018), my own experience, both as a teacher and researcher with SpLDs, provided me an opportunity to consider my own 'neurodiverse ways of knowing': a notion borrowed from feminism, which positions personal experiences and background as a valuable asset in research design and execution (Belenky *et al*., 1988).

The decision to use semi-structured interviews provided rich textual data, while the interview schedule headings and corresponding questions provided the necessary parameters to explore specific understandings of the policy process, policy techniques and performativity. Although it could be argued the partly structured nature of the interviews may have restricted participant's responses, as Robinson (2002) observes, the semi-structured format provided the opportunity to be agile and to modify the line of enquiry as and when needed. Albeit the data analysis includes techniques adopted from thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Watts, 2013), it was necessary to tailor and craft a process that assisted and appreciated recall techniques that would benefit a neurodiverse mind.

During the interviews, an unexpected and surprising reflexive experience happened regarding my own SpLD status. The reflexive experience is explained in Chapter 4.3. However, I think it is important here to draw attention to a call for greater reflexivity for any researcher who engages in research that is closely connected to their own identity. For me, it would have been beneficial to have kept a reflexive journal from the point of the research inception to the end of the data analysis period (Finlay, 2002). I did not think to do this and as a consequence, following the interviews with the two participants who declared their SpLD status, I spent some time reflecting on my own management of my SpLD diagnoses; in particular, admonishing myself for not being more comfortable with my diagnosis. In addition, I ruminated on why I had not been more 'open' with my students about my SpLD status as it may have benefitted them. Unlike the teacher and tutor (Participant I), I was less than accepting of the making of spelling mistakes, or forgetting of dates. Instead, I chose to burden myself with a whole toolkit of resilient strategies, rather than accept I might be fallible. However, the post interview reflexivity provided me the opportunity to allow my own feelings and understandings of being neurodivergent to 'deepen'; it began a cathartic process, one which continued throughout the data analysis and write up of this research (Ellis *et al*., 1997, cited in, Finlay, 2002).

Furthermore, although the intention of this research had been to provide a holistic exploration of the policy process, policy techniques and performativity in the construction of teachers with SpLDs as subjects, it is in part my own subjective experience that has informed the research inquiry. Furthermore, the finding of the *cult of the performative teacher* has assisted in the reflexive and cathartic process; I now better understand my own complicity in stimulating and performing to the cult ideal of a teaching professional. Furthermore, I better appreciate how the policy techniques concerned with proof have attributed to the construction and subjectification of my identity as a teacher with SpLDs, in the English FE sector.

## 8.5 Implications

The role of the *cult of the performative teach*er has not been fully recognised, particularly in terms of teachers with SpLDs in the FE sector. This role needs to be considered in any future research which explores the construction of teachers with SpLDs, or teachers identified as neurodiverse. A further implication of the research is that the teacher with SpLDs is placed within the policy context of the FE sector, with an emphasis on exploring the contribution that policy processes, policy techniques and performativity have on the construction of teachers with SpLDs as subjects in the FE sector.

In reference to the first finding, the *cult of the performative teacher*, is a symptom of the wider post-panoptic performativity and how it affects all policy actors. If policy researchers and the subjects of research, the policy actors, better understood how the FE sector operates with regard to policy and the policy techniques in place, they may be able to negotiate their own practice. In relation to the second finding on *post-panoptic performativity*, the implication is there is now a greater recognition of the micro and meso agency exercised by policy actors in the English FE sector. All policy actors working in the FE colleges, and in the FE organisations, agencies and departments, are subject to post-panoptic performativity and therefore future research needs to consider a similar holistic approach (Perryman, *et al*., 2018). Policy techniques of stimulation exist at both levels of micro and meso agency, and for all policy actors, such a holistic approach will assist in moving away from research that concentrates on insular understandings of subjectification.

The final implication in relation to the third finding, *prove or improve techniques*, is in the uncovering of policy techniques associated with the notion of 'improving' performance outcomes. On closer exploration, the techniques of improvement are part of a doubled sided performative coin, concerned with accountability and not distinguishable from techniques of proof. The techniques of improve assist in understandings around how policy actors and practice are influenced and how the processes work, and in particular how the policy techniques of improve lead to the cult and the subjectification of all policy actors.

## 8.6 Future research

In relation to the subject matter of teachers with SpLDs, future research should approach the inquiry from adopting the new nomenclature of neurodiversity. Furthermore, research into teachers with SpLDs should no longer relegate the status of the affected teacher to their neurodiverse status, as to do so opens up the possibility of sub-grouping them from their neurotypical colleagues. Instead, the teacher with SpLDs should be recast as a policy actor, in-line with their colleagues and peers. Moreover, by continuing to separate teachers based on their social characteristics, such as disability, potential opportunities to expose systemic flaws in the education system become compartmentalised and the common subjectifying techniques fail to be noticed.

In addition, this thesis provides insights into the opportunities for policy actors to contribute to policy direction and implementation of policy, and in doing so, the level of agency they exercise during the contribution. In the responses from participants it was unclear whether questions had been asked about what could be done to create and promote an inclusive working environment, one which recognised the workforce as being heterogeneous. In developing on the notion of inclusion, future research should concern itself with developing at the micro and meso levels of the FE sector written policies and protocols that recognise and put processes in place to appreciate a heterogeneous workforce, one which recognises and celebrates neurodiversity. Finally, further research should concentrate on the policy consultation process, at the micro and meso level, with the intention of identifying good models of consultation practice to assist the FE sector in future informal and formal stages of consultation.

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## Appendix A: Interview Questions

| Research Questions | Key Interview Questions Middle Managers & Teachers | Prompts (Qs asked to participants) | Probes | Analysis | Notes |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Q1 What role do key policy actors play in the construction of teachers with Specific Learning Difficulties as 'subjects'? | Who do you think are the policy actors? Are you? | | | | |
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| | | | | | |
| | | Take me through a working day for you. Or Take me through a working day from last week. | Was there anything unusual about that day? If so, what? Is it a typical day? | | |
| | Tell me about your professional identity. | What is your current role? | Do you have any additional roles or responsibilities? If so, what are they? | | |

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|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Q2 What role do key policy actors play in the construction of teachers with Specific Learning Difficulties as 'subjects'? | What is your role in the generation/implementation of performative policy? To what extent a do you engage with policy, is their engagement passive or active? | What informs your teaching and learning practice? | Internal influences. External influences. | | |
| | How much autonomy do you have over your teaching practice? | Do you seek guidance on your practice from your line manager? | Have you referred to departmental/college wider guides on teaching practice? | | Ask about a particular policy that is important to the interviewee. |
| | Where do you feature in the decision making process? | Are you provided the opportunity to contribute to the practice of 'good' teaching and learning? | What is your part in the consultation process? Can you talk me through the process? | | |
| | | Whom or what do you believe to be the key influences on the practice of teachers? | Internal influences. External influences. | | |
| | | | | | |
| | | | | | |
| | | Where do/did you feature in the decision making process? | | | |

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|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Q3 What are the benefits, purposes, and expectations of performativity discourse and practice, according to policy actors within the FE sector? | What factors go into performance policy which centres on teaching and learning? | What considerations are made in the evaluation of a lesson? | Who would you expect to benefit from performative measures performance initiatives like T&L obs? Or year progression assessments? | | |
| | | | | | |
| | Do you think this differs from government expectations? | Could you tell me what you perceive to be the purpose of performance measures in education? | | | |
| Q4 What potential challenges might teachers with SpLDs face in the light of performance driven policy? | What do you think are the potential challenges for teachers with SpLDs in regards to performative education policy? | Describe to me what you believe makes an effective teaching professional. | | | |
| | | What are the key attributes of a 'good' teacher? | | | |
| | | Do you know what a SpLD is? | Definition of SpLD | | |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Have you worked with or managed a teaching professional who has a SpLD? | How did you support them? Where you able to/would you be able to seek guidance on how to support them? | | |
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| | | | | | |
| | | If you had to support/guide a teaching professional with a SpLD, how would you go about doing so? | | | |
| | | | | | |
| | | Are you aware of any organisations that offer support and guidance on how adults with SpLDs can be supported? | | | |

| Research Questions | Key Interview Questions Principals/SLT | Prompts (Qs asked to participants) | Probes | Analysis | Notes |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Q1 What role do key policy actors play in the construction of teachers with Specific Learning Difficulties as 'subjects'? | Who do you think are the policy actors? Are you? | What is your current role? | | | |
| | Tell me about your professional identity. | Do you have any additional roles or responsibilities? If so, what are they? | Reminder: If, so what are they? | | |
| | | | | | |
| | | Take me through a working day for you. Or Take me through a working day from last week. | Was there anything unusual about that day? If so, what? | | |
| | | | | | |
| Q2 What role do key policy actors play in the construction of teachers with Specific Learning Difficulties as 'subjects'? | What is your role in the generation/implementation of performative policy? To what extent do you engage with policy, is the engagement passive or active? | Describe to me as you understand it the process of introducing new college policy. | Generation and enactment | | |

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|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | What contribution do you make to the introduction of new college policy? | Talk me through a policy initiative that you have been instrumental in - can be anything related to performance, staff training, quality improvement, quality assessment, equality etc. | | | Ask about a particular policy that is important to the interviewee. |
| | Where do you feature in the decision making process? | | | | |
| | | Alternatively: Based on your experience, describe how education policy is generated. | | | Amended for 2nd setting |
| | | Or: How is education policy created? | | | |
| | | Whom or what do you believe to be the key influences in the generation of education policy? | | | In the initial discussions both the UCU and AoC stated they had no real control over the initial generation stage of policy. They represented their organisations during open consultation periods - but at best they could only say they may have influenced policy but didn't know for sure. |
| | | Where do/did you feature in the decision making process? | | | Amended for 2nd setting |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Q3 What are the benefits, purposes, and expectations of performativity discourse and practice, according to policy actors within the FE sector? | What do you think are the benefits/purposes of performative policy and performance management in FE? | Could you tell me what you perceive to be the purpose of performance measures in Education? | Who would you expect to benefit from performative measures in Education? | | Applicable for both |
| | | | | | Applicable for both |
| | Do you think this differs from government expectations? | What do you consider to be the markers of success in an FE institution? | | | Applicable for both |
| Q4 What potential challenges might teachers with SpLDs face in the light of performance driven policy? | What do you think are the potential challenges for teachers with SpLDs in regards to performative education policy? | Describe to me what you believe makes an effective teaching professional. | | | Applicable for both |
| | | What are the key attributes of a 'good' teacher? | | | Applicable for both |
| | | Do you know what an SpLD is? | Definition of SpLD | | |
| | | Have you worked with a teaching professional who has a SpLD? | | | |
| | | Are you aware of the number of working teaching professionals with an SpLD? | | | Amended for 2nd setting |
| | | Do you know what support they received? | | | |

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|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | What support would you expect them to receive? | | | Amended for 2nd setting |
| | | If you had to support/guide a teaching professional with a SpLD, how would you go about doing so? | | | |
| | | If you had to support/guide a member of staff with a SpLD, how would you go about doing so? | | | Amended for 2nd setting |
| | | Are you aware of any organisations that offer support and guidance on how adults with SpLDs can be supported? | | | Applicable for both |

| Research Questions | Key Interview Questions Teachers (SpLDs) | Prompts (Qs asked to participants) | Probes | Analysis | Notes |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Q1 What role do key policy actors play in the construction of teachers with Specific Learning | Who do you think are the policy actors? Are you? | | | | |

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|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Difficulties as 'subjects'? | | | | | |
| | | | | | |
| | | | | | |
| | | Take me through a working day for you. Or Take me through a working day from last week. | Was there anything unusual about that day? If so, what? Is it a typical day? | | |
| | Tell me about your professional identity. | What is your current role? | Do you have any additional roles or responsibilities? If so, what are they? | | |
| Q2 What role do key policy actors play in the construction of teachers with Specific Learning Difficulties as 'subjects'? | What is your role in the generation/implementation of performative policy? To what extent a do you engage with policy, is their engagement passive or active? | What informs your teaching and learning practice? | Internal influences. External influences. | | |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | How much autonomy do you have over your teaching practice? | Do you seek guidance on your practice from your line manager? | Have you referred to departmental/college wider guides on teaching practice? | | Ask about a particular policy that is important to the interviewee. |
| | Where do you feature in the decision making process? | Are you provided the opportunity to contribute to the practice of 'good' teaching and learning? | What is your part in the consultation process? Can you talk me through the process? | | |
| | | Whom or what do you believe to be the key influences on the practice of teachers? | Internal influences. External influences. | | |
| | | | | | |
| | | | | | |
| | | Where do/did you feature in the decision making process? | | | |

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|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Q3 What are the benefits, purposes, and expectations of performativity discourse and practice, according to policy actors within the FE sector? | What factors go into performance policy which centres on teaching and learning? | What considerations are made in the evaluation of a lesson? | Who would you expect to benefit from performative measures performance initiatives like T&L obs? Or year progression assessments? | | |
| | | | | | |
| | Do you think this differs from government expectations? | Could you tell me what you perceive to be the purpose of performance measures in education? | | | |
| Q4 What potential challenges might teachers with SpLDs face in the light of performance driven policy? | What do you think are the potential challenges for teachers with SpLDs in regards to performative education policy? | Describe to me what you believe makes an effective teaching professional. | | | |
| | | What are the key attributes of a 'good' teacher? | | | |
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|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | As a teacher with an SpLD how are you supported? | Have you disclosed your SpLD? | Are you aware about how and when you would declare? Have you been asked to declare? Who have you declared to? | | |
| | | What are the reasons for your disclosure/non-disclosure? | Do you feel disclosure is necessary? | | |
| | | Do you consider your own SpLD when planning lessons? | In what way? | | |
| | | Have you sought support from your employer? | Is support necessary? Could you talk me through what followed after you alerted your manager? | | |

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| | | Are you familiar with any guidance/support available for teachers with SpLDs? | Either internal or external. | | |
| | | Have you experienced any difficulty/challenges in the enactment of college policy? | | | |

| Research Questions | Key Interview Questions FE Org/Ag/Dept | Prompts (Qs asked to participants) | Probes | Analysis | Notes |
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| Q1 What role do key policy actors play in the construction of teachers with Specific Learning Difficulties as 'subjects'? | Who do you think are the policy actors? Are you? | Take me through a working day for you. Or Take me through a working day from last week. | Was there anything unusual about that day? If so, what? | | |
| | Tell me about your professional identity. | Do you have any additional roles or responsibilities? If so, what are they? | Remind: If, so what are they? | | |
| | | What external department/agencies/organisations do you work with? | Is this on a consultancy basis? Are you seeking the advice or providing it? | | |

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| Q2 What role do key policy actors play in the construction of teachers with Specific Learning Difficulties as 'subjects'? | What is your role in the generation/implementation of performative policy? To what extent a do you engage with policy, is their engagement passive or active? | Alternatively: Based on your experience, describe how education policy is generated. | Talk me through the consultation/lobbying process. At what stage would you join the consultation? | | |
| | What contribution do you make to the introduction of new college policy? | Or: How is education policy created? | Tell me more about who is involved. | | Ask about a particular policy that is important to the interviewee. |
| | Where do you feature in the decision making process? | What is the decision tree? Whom/what organisation-body makes the final decision? | | | |
| | | Whom or what do you believe to be the key influences in the generation of education policy? | | | In the initial discussions both the UCU and AoC stated they had no real control over the initial generation stage of policy. They represented their |

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| | | | | | organisations during open consultation periods - but at best they could only say they may have influenced policy but didn't know for sure. |
| | | What considerations would you expect a college to make before implementing any new performance/accountability policy? | Is there a standard approach to how policy is implemented in colleges? Any particular model followed? Any trends in behaviour? | | |
| Q3 What are the benefits, purposes, and expectations of performativity discourse and practice, according to policy actors within the FE sector? | What do you think are the benefits/purposes of performative policy and performance management in FE? | Could you tell me in what you perceive to be the purpose of performance measures in Education? | Who would you expect to benefit from performative measures in Education? | | |

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| | | In the absence of graded lessons, do you think the emphasis has shifted from proving to improving performance? | | | |
| | | In your experience would say there is a coherent approach on policy decisions between the FE colleges, the government and other related FE organisations? | What prevents that coherency? | | |
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| | Do you think this differs from government expectations? | What do you consider to be the markers of success in an FE institution? | | | |
| Q4 What potential challenges might teachers with SpLDs face in the light of performance driven policy? | What do you think are the potential challenges for teachers with SpLDs in regards to performative education policy? | Describe to me what you believe makes an effective teaching professional. | | | |

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| | | What are the key attributes of a 'good' teacher? | What do you think might be the barriers to 'good' teaching and learning? | | |
| | | Do you know what an SpLD is? | Definition of SpLD | | |
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| | | Are you aware of the number of working teaching professionals with an SpLDs? | What is the source of your data? | | |
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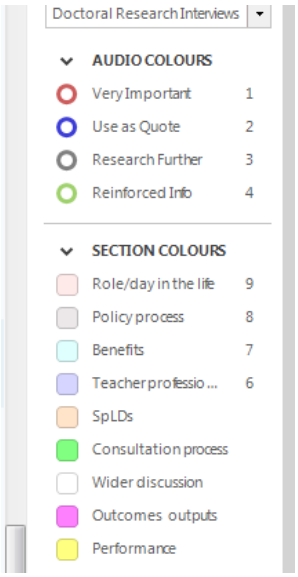
| | | Are you aware of any organisations that offer support and guidance on how adults with SpLDs can be supported? | Following the Equal Ops Act of 2010, was there any guidance provided for employers on how they might support those that come under the 'protected characteristic' category? | Are you aware of any good practice? | |

## Appendix B:  Key for Research Headings and Colours




1. Role/day in the life = peach
2. Policy process = beige
3. Benefits = light blue
4. Teacher professionalism = purple
5. SpLDs = sand colour
6. Consultation process = green
7. Wider discussion = white
8. Outcomes/outputs = pink
9. Performance = yellow

# Appendix C: Synthesis 1st Stage Heading Analysis

| Participant | Organisation Type | Role/day in the life | Policy process | Benefits/ Beneficiary | Teacher professionalism | SpLDs | Consultation process | Wider discussion | Outcomes/ Outputs | Performance |
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| Part I - teacher with SpLD | SFC | 2 x incidences. Teacher & Tutor - distinction made between what is expected by Ofsted as what they do. Tutor role they stated they felt 'not free enough to do what they wanted. | 19 x incidences - Stated that it was HoD decision to consult on the progression exam process. | 3 x incidences. Stated HoD/SLT benefitted from performance measures and said it was 'not for me at all'. | 2 x incidences. Stated there were examples in there department and they were 'good' because 'structurally good' - stated 'a good teacher needs to have a really strong structure to the lesson'. They also stated that they were aware that the personality of the teacher is important students have to 'like the teacher'. | 26 x incidences. Stated they had disclosed to their HoD. States they had positive response from students when they had declared to their teaching groups. They have only disclosed to parents on the odd occasion and stated they would not disclose 'in a job that wasn't teaching' or in applications to private schools. HoD on receiving disclosure asked if there was anything they could do. They have an SpLD and described in great detail how this affected the way they managed being a TP. They cited the A Level reform as particularly challenging for them. | 5 incidences. Stated not included in consultation on progression exams until HoD sought their thoughts. Also gave another example of where they were not consulted - mock exam dates were set by Exam Officer. In their role as a tutor they get consulted after a policy is released in the form of a request for feedback - they could not recall a time they were consulted beforehand. | 3 x incidences. Discussed whether the context in which a lesson obs took place was ever considered - they answered no. Teaching practice determined by department policy - pressure to include for example flip learning as HoD decided that was a good method to try. The sense of feeling 'childish' for telling people they are dyslexic. | 0 | 5 x indecencies. They asked if I wanted to tell them what 'they' are looking for, rather than what they do. They also made some reference to department policy on delivering large skills sessions that didn't work, but they felt the HoD was reluctant to drop as how could she prove in the SAR how she had addressed some of the concerns following lessons obs. |
| Part L - | Head of Equality at large Union | 1x incident. The explained their role as the head of equality and participation. They head up | 5 x incidences. Described the policy process during consultations often a closed | 0 | 0. No direct discussion on teacher professionalism. But we discussed later the implications on a | 4 x incidences. Stated across the membership RA were done in a piecemeal way. Also made reference to the | 4 x incidences. Noted as a thankless task. Concern about the directive behind the | 4 x incidences. Concerns of the cut in funds and the portrayal of the 'plucky disabled person' often they don't feel positive. | 0 | 2 |

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| | | national equality policy. | system. Described it as a tick boxing exercise. | | teacher if reasonable adjustments are not forth coming. | inclusive directive tends not to come from above, responsibility for supporting staff with disabilities usually falls to line manager and department budgets. Also interesting that the disability committee of the membership organisation do not want to differentiate - this was noted as a problem as it leads to gaps in the available support/advice. | consultation process. | Agenda to ignore the difference - but the difference needs to be supported. The negative response following disclosure - diagnosis often seen as a problem. Ineffective 'Access to Work' scheme employers don't mention it. Funding cuts. No one checks once the 'positive about disability' tick is given to colleges. | | |
| Part F - Former Principal | Former Principal of GFEC & SFC | 2 x incidences. Mainly discussed former role as Principal of a number of FE institutions & new role as consultant as part of partnership agreement. | 2 x incidences. On policy it was made clear that directive should not come Ofsted/ that staff should be consulted and prepared to co-write a collective policy. Highlighted governors concern at moving away from Ofsted directive, but ironically Ofsted themselves never insisted on graded lessons, SAR in Ofsted framework. | 1 x incident. Raised concern about difficult to defend some of the 'sloppiness' pre 1992. But acknowledged it had swung too far the other way. | 4 x incidences. Focus on what is best for the student. But recognised there is just not one model of the perfect teaching professional. Believes that teachers should not be measured on absolutes of what should be included in a lesson. | 4 x incidences. Stated that any experience of making RA for staff tended to be for visible conditions. Not aware of any external guidance on how to support teachers with SpLDs. Acknowledge that they have not been active in addressing the potential of staff with SpLDs, but neither have they been 'poked' to do so. | 8 x incidences. Of interest noted the cultural differences that might exist with a large FE college - how T&L might be viewed differently between academic & Vocational teachers. Stated that consultation should happen with staff whenever possible - that way staff can't say they were not part of the process or the decision. | 7 x raised logistic problems of collectively meeting with all staff to consult in a large FE college. Recognised that the context is important in LO. Problems of managing the governors who favoured the more performative accounting and results. Cultural challenge of trying to make them understand how teaching works. Raised issue of lack of trust in the public sector not unique to teaching. | 0 | 6 x incidences. Stated T&L management has been 'grounded in the wrongheaded business sort of ethics". Encouraged to focus on the monetary value of students rather than what was best for them. Stated that ironically business has realised that the cruder performance management stuff doesn't work, but yet education policy keeps with measuring quality that way. |

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| Part G - Former representative from membership organisation | FE membership organisation | 1 x incident. Discussed former role as Director of employment policy & services. | 9 x incidences. Discussed at length how members are represented during the consultation process with Whitehall & Government. Highlighted both a formal & informal consultation process - stated as a large lobbying organisation with developed stakeholder relationships - giving them an opportunity privately, not publically to shape policy directives. Could not recall examples of where SLT had consulted their staff - stated that FE sector had not inspired a culture of shaping learning organisations. Stated FE was a 'command and control hierarchal institution'. | 2 x incidences. Clear in response - Principal is the beneficiary. He stated that he didn't believe the primary thought of teachers was to think about whether they were working for a grade 1 or 4 institution. | 1 x incident. Referred to the context/environment in which the teacher works. If they are working in a challenging environment and still get results aren't they more effective than a teacher that works in a more resourced environment. | 0 | 8 x incidences. Noted there would be an expectation that SLT would of consulted staff but they didn't know if they did or not. Links to points made in Heading 2. | 4 x refers to key leadership as a key contributor to the success of a college. - issue of leaders that think of year to year to keep it safe - not progress 'sustaining being adequate'. Stated education does not meet the business needs - LEPs set up in some areas but not across the board. FE is not seen as a destination for employment. | 8 x incidences. Refers back to the command & control point - people working to the glass ceiling of what they have been graded as. Focus on performance prevents organisations from being responsive | 3 x incidences. Referred to one example of college that moved away from graded lessons - stated mature organisations have challenging discussions - but also noted that principal at the college was coming to the end of her career, so might feel more safe to take chances - college principals don't get opportunities to take risks - this limits the ability to do different things. |
| Part C - Staff develo | FE College | 3 x incidences. They discussed balance three | 13 x incidences. Discussed the | 1 x incident. In response to main | 4 x incidences. Response to what makes a good | 4 x incidences. This was particularly | 8 x incidences. Stated no directive from | 4 x incidences. CPD for teachers student centric - | 0 | 0 |

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| pment / HoD | | roles, head of department, managing staff development & teaching. They made some comments on the fact that they thought they would have more freedom in the SD role, but it is more of a admin role. | CPD policy, the college didn't have one but it did have some CPD protocols. Average member of staff is less likely to be consulted on CPD matters. Tends to be influenced by Ofsted/teaching framework agenda & is student-centric. Wider T&P they adapt or omit & hope it is not noticed . | beneficiary of CPD - response notes student is and if something is beneficial it is an 'unusual spin off' and is not by design. | teaching professional is student centric - how to engage students etc. More interesting is the response to what barriers might prevent an effective teacher - again the response is student-centric, how to get through the curriculum for students, how to get students involved in all activities. Asked the question again and parents are mentioned and time to network and develop for students benefit. | interesting as they disclosed that they suspected they had dyslexia but made a point that they would not pursue a diagnosis as they feared how it might be perceived. | SLT for HoD's to consult but they did most of the time. Stated that a staff committee had been set up for consultative purposes but it folded - reason given because teachers felt they had too much workload already. | did not focus on developing the individual it was about how they could develop their students. Disclosure of SpLD was raised - even with diagnosis they would think twice about disclosing on an application form. Parents seen as threat - have to be careful of litigious parents. | | |
| Part H-Divisional Head/tutor/teacher/ EQR lead | FE College | 3 x incidences. Explained three roles and linked to participation in consultation process. | 10 x incidences. Discussed their role in local level college creation & explained the policy process - interestingly stated they selected who to consult out of the staff they managed. Also stated that contextualising policy per subject was something that should be encouraged, although stated Ofsted | 0 | 3 x incidences. Defined a prof teacher as someone who didn't leave at 4, and was always striving to improve. Referred to a comment by a former VP who stated the hallmark of a good teacher was just that little bit of insecurity. On answering what might be the barriers to a good teaching prof, they stated disruptive students and government reforms that are intent on shaking things up - to take complacency - | 4 x incidences. Had some experience at supporting staff with disabilities - and said they would make similar adjustments for staff as they would for students. However stated it was the responsibility for the affected individual to disclose. Also said something interesting about if a teacher with SpLD had got through the teacher training it can't really be a barrier. | 2 x incidences. Part of the consultation process at manager meetings and select committee meetings. When asked if in their role as a teacher they were consulted they said yes, but then gave an example of a committee group that was attend by middle and senior managers only . | 3 x incidences. Made interesting point as EQR lead that since Ofsted stopped graded lessons most organisations request no graded lessons - following form. Compared teachers to other public service professionals in a fatalistic comment that they all have to do what they are told sometimes. | 0 | 4 x incidences. In question on performance being about proving rather than improving, they stated it is both. But problems in performance should be managed in a developmental way. |

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| | | | would not agree. Also gave examples of where they have recontextualised policy as a teacher and tutor. | | Gove was mentioned and the problems of the New Right, alongside criticisms of 'lounge room Marxists' who don't accept things that can't be stopped. Interesting link to other public professionals like doctors and nurses stating 'sometimes you have to do what you are told to do'. | | | | | |
| Part E Director of policy at a membership organisation | Membership organisation | 1 x incident. Role explained lobbying on behalf of membership, consulted on policy with government and Whitehall. | 8 x incidences. Lots of detail on the policy process with specific examples, T Levels. Policy process nuances, depends on the policy directive - if the process is open. Policy process can be a lengthy one. Discusses that were possible policy can be recontextualised. | 0 | 0 | 1 x incident. Stated the organisation does not collect data on staff with SpLDs and principals have never sought assistance with the EA 2010 & reasonable adjustments. | 6 x incidences. States in the past consultation process has been more closed. T Level a more co-creative process. More open and consultative language used. Some discussion on whom should be consulting staff. Not role of membership organisation. | 5 x incidences. It is within the power of slt & governors to set the character of an institution, to be more developmental than punitive - they can recontexualise policy if they wish. Point made about English system being a low trust system. Performance measures are put in place as not trusted to deliver outcomes. Linked to heading 5. matters of disclosure and cultural shifts so staff want to disclose. | 2 x incidences. There is lots of performance data you can prove or disprove anything - the data is used for policy makers and politicians to get what they want. Using the right measures with the appropr | 3 x incidences. Measurements of performance do not equal a negative culture, it is the way it is implemented. Ofsted look after quality assurance & improvement. Lately they have been preoccupied by the former this is due to a interventionist culture. |

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| | | | | | | | | | iate sectors - FE colleges do well with outcome destination data. | |
| Part H- Divisional Head/tutor/teacher/ EQR lead | FE College | 3 x incidences. Explained three roles and linked to participation in consultation process. | 10 x incidences. Discussed their role in local level college creation & explained the policy process - interestingly stated they selected who to consult out of the staff they managed. Also stated that contextualising policy per subject was something that should be encouraged, although stated Ofsted would not agree. Also gave examples of where they have recontextualised policy as a teacher and tutor. | 0 | 3 x incidences. Defined a prof teacher as someone who didn't leave at 4, and was always striving to improve. Referred to a comment by a former VP who stated the hallmark of a good teacher was just that little bit of insecurity. On answering what might be the barriers to a good teaching prof, they stated disruptive students and government reforms that are intent on shaking things up - to take complacency - Gove was mentioned and the problems of the New Right, alongside criticisms of 'lounge room Marxists' who don't accept things that can't be stopped. Interesting link to other public | 4 x incidences. Had some experience at supporting staff with disabilities - and said they would make similar adjustments for staff as they would for students. However stated it was the responsibility for the affected individual to disclose. Also said something interesting about if a teacher with SpLD had got through the teacher training it can't really be a barrier. | 2 x incidences. Part of the consultation process at manager meetings and select committee meetings. When asked if in their role as a teacher they were consulted they said yes, but then gave an example of a committee group that was attend by middle and senior managers only . | 3 x incidences. Made interesting point as EQR lead that since Ofsted stopped graded lessons most organisations request no graded lessons - following form. Compared teachers to other public service professionals in a fatalistic comment that they all have to do what they are told sometimes. | 0 | 4 x incidences. In question on performance being about proving rather than improving, they stated it is both. But problems in performance should be managed in a developmental way. |

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| | | | | | professionals like doctors and nurses stating 'sometimes you have to do what you are told to do'. | | | | | |
| Part E Director of policy at a membership organisation | Membership organisation | 1 x incident. Role explained lobbying on behalf of membership, consulted on policy with government and Whitehall. | 8 x incidences. Lots of detail on the policy process with specific examples, T Levels. Policy process nuances, depends on the policy directive - if the process is open. Policy process can be a lengthy one. Discusses that were possible policy can be recontextualised. | 0 | 0 | 1 x incident. Stated the organisation does not collect data on staff with SpLDs and principals have never sought assistance with the EA 2010 & reasonable adjustments. | 6 x incidences. States in the past consultation process has been more closed. T Level a more co-creative process. More open and consultative language used. Some discussion on whom should be consulting staff. Not role of membership organisation. | 5 x incidences. It is within the power of slt & governors to set the character of an institution, to be more developmental than punitive - they can recontexualise policy if they wish. Point made about English system being a low trust system. Performance measures are put in place as not trusted to deliver outcomes. Linked to heading 5. matters of disclosure and cultural shifts so staff want to disclose. | 2 x incidences. There is lots of performance data you can prove or disprove anything - the data is used for policy makers and politicians to get what they want. Using the right measures with the appropriate sectors - FE colleges do well with outcome destination data. | 3 x incidences. Measurements of performance do not equal a negative culture, it is the way it is implemented. Ofsted look after quality assurance & improvement. Lately they have been preoccupied by the former this is due to a interventionist culture. |

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| Part N Principal | FE institution | 3 x incidences. Refers to three roles and the varied expectations. Acknowledges the strategic benefits of external post as committee member. | 9 x incidences. Discusses at length the internal and external process of policy process. Recognises blockages in the internal process, lay teaching staff not always included. Externally more success with informally policy negotiations than formal - partly to do with the strength of lobbying alongside a powerful membership organisation. | 1 x incident. This was referred to in a discussion about performance - parents and the government were cited as the beneficiaries . | 0 | 0. | 5 x incidences. Some reflection on the difference between 'intention and reality' acknowledged that consultation at all levels within the college was patchy, HoD named as one failure point. Stressed desire to consult on all levels. | 2 x incidences. Interesting reflection on surprise at how opinions varied depending on the subject area, creating an inclusive culture - by creating feedback options for staff and students & 'open door policy' for staff to drop in. | 3 x incidences. Stated eye on outputs as corporation holds them to account for outputs. Lesson obs criteria is set at good or better, stresses that numerical data only tells you so much. | 2 x incidencies.This is linked to heading 3. Takes exception to the validity of performance data as it is misleading - a focus on destinations is skewed for institutions were a large amount go onto gap years/HE etc. Performance assessment is stated as benefitting the government as they can assess the ups and downs - this is not what they are interested in, it is claimed. |
| Part O Principal and Teacher | FE College | 2 x incidences. Discussed the demands of the Principal role, but stressed that teaching commitments were sacrosanct. | 8 x incidences. Discussed local policy process, produced in the first by principal then shared and discussed at several stages, middle management/ HoD's/working groups and at staff conference. Example of reflective consultation | 2 x incidences. Stressed clearly the benefits of performance according to Ofsted would be students - but challenge their logic made distinction between 'standards in a data sense and in a real sense' - referred to | 3 x incidences. This is was particularly interesting as the response to what makes an effective TP and what might be the barriers to being an effective TP were philosophical and behavioural, stated 'kindness & courage' on barriers - that teachers do not like to disclose when they are struggling for fear of judgment - also made some points | 3 x incidences. Although no documented policy was referred to, a clear process was described in terms of how internal support would be sought through the channels that are available to students. | 7 x incidences. A very clear sense that policy at times is getting 'done to them' removing the AS Jan resit is an example giving and both the A Level consultation and the T Level consultation was on implementation only. Some successful lobbying examples | 6 x incidences. Interesting policy technique of penalising colleges who did not move over to the new applied general, they were funded but did not appear on performance tables. Lesson observation models - raised points about them being flawed, what is being measured the teacher or the learning, referred to Japanese model that focuses on the students and is | 2 x incidences. In reference to other teaching models - the Japanese - outcomes such as getting a student to contribute to | 7 x incidences. Measuring performance in lessons obs can be a starting point for development but there is a fear and the part believes Ofsted played a part in that agenda. Performance judgements can be more sensitive and nuanced. Tension between quality assurance & developmental approach. Good example of |

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| | | | and change to policy following the first round of AS liner exams. Some involvement in policy changes to A Level and T Level - but limited to implementation. Describes how they recontextualised the new A Level Linear to suit the College. | they could play the 'A Level game' | about the assumptions made about teachers skills - it is assumed they know what to do. | | when lobby as part of AoC & SFCA i.e. changes to grading for the new applied general. | more nuanced by considering outcomes not just outputs/numerical measures. The need for a system to manage underperformance in a holistic way is necessary to develop an under developing teacher - made interesting links to performance management - that it is tainted and there is tension between professionals have a responsibility to meet standards and being supported enough to meet the standards. Final point - performative culture permeates teachers they focus on having evidence that they have imparted knowledge i.e. providing all students with detailed booklets and students who are instrumental and pragmatic in their education - focus on the grade not the journey. | group work isn't easily measured, but you can observe the behaviour. | performance in terms of student approach to writing a personal statement, approached it like a tick box exercise - what do I need to do to perform. Performance - 'preoccupation with KPIs..you forget what education is about'. |
| Part K, teacher with SpLD | SFC | 2 x incidences. Discussed managing the role of teacher and tutor team leader. Demands of both roles required | 4 x incidences. The process of how policy is written was acknowledge to be something | 1 x incident. Interestingly they identify themselves as the first beneficiary of performance | 2 x incidences. They open with a the expression of 'passion' to describe a good teaching professional. If they have the | 10 x incidences. Discussed openly their own diagnosis experience and matters relating to disclosure. Clear that they feel quite | 3 x incidences. Acknowledge purpose of consultation, but struggled more to provide examples. | 7 x incidences. Some discussion regarding tutors interpretation pastoral policy to suit tutees. The need for the context of subjects | 1 x incident. In discussion of timing of lesson | 1 x incident. In reference to what are the indicators of a successful college - direct answer linked to outputs - how many A* and |

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| | | them to work throughout the day, even lunch was eaten at desk space. | that tended to be done by SLT, with maybe HoD feedback, although they believed they were consulted and referred to the progression exam subject considerations as an example of where their subjects circumstances were considered. Believed that a policy should be in place to support staff with SpLD, but also acknowledge their responsibility in seeking that support. Also discussed how local policy had presented them with specific challenges - interesting observation made about how the marking policy didn't permit enough time for non-SpLD teachers. | measures - they can check what they are like as a teacher and how effective they are, then they move on to identify students as beneficiaries and finally the College itself - the College can check the quality of teachers. | ability to apply knowledge to a particular criteria - instrumental view of teaching. On the question of barriers to good teaching - Time is noted as a key barrier. | confident in declaring, but examples of disclosure to students were centred around acknowledging a weakness - if mistake made on board - dyslexia used as explanation - or used to show students not to give up as their teacher isn't perfect they have dyslexia. Time to complete tasks came up often with some low level pressure implied from HoD. | Unsure of whether consultation process made it to include teachers - progression exams example went back to DD with thoughts and assumed - not confirmed thoughts were feedback to SLT. | to be considered when planning lesson obs. Discussed matters around disclosure to students/manager/ college policy on supporting staff with SpLDs not aware of negotiated support at HoD level. AtW scheme due to language used assumed for physical disabilities. | obs and the unsuitability of certain times of the year due to practical exams they stated - although observers could 'tick some boxes' they wouldn't get a full appreciation. Interesting perception of purpose to tick boxes, but did not question the value of that process. | pass rates did the college get. |

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| Part M, Co-director, centre of post-education and work consultancy | Consultancy / FE and HE | 3 x incidences. Discussed teaching and consultancy roles. Taught in the school, FE and HE sector. Stated moved to FE sector as pay and terms of service better at the time than schools. | 0 | 3 x incidences. On first being asked who were the main beneficiaries stated Ofsted would say students - when pushed stated with the shift towards competition post incorp, students needs are likely to have not been met. Although reflected and stated that the shift towards focusing on how learners learn than how teachers teach may of had benefits for students. | 1 x incident. Observed that since incorporation the notion of professionalism was lost - no longer identify as being part of a profession, more localised now with the academy culture, having greater connection with academy group staff than a teacher who does not work in an academy group. | 0 | 2 x incidences. Discusses their role as a contactor working for a development agency in a supportive role. Interesting focus on language - consulted to provide 'guidance' and 'support'. | 8 x incidences. Many of the wider discussion matters centred around evidence that could be used to support the FE chapter of the lit review - the effect of incorporation - competition, loss of local authority input to cater for the needs of the community, no clear remit for the FE sector as it is not easy to define - define by what it isn't rather than what it is, the impact in continued funding cuts, increased contact hours means less time for staff to network, do CPD etc. | 3 x incidences. Post incorp focus of inspection team on outputs no contribution to develop colleges/teachers that do not meet the grade. Measuring in a meaningful way value added and destination data useful, but difficult to track destinations after they leave education. | 3 x incidences. Interesting observation that requirements of Ofsted push behaviour - it defines what is important - it might be irrelevant but that is what we measure, so that is what we put our efforts into. |
| Part P, VP and teacher | SFC | 2 x incidences. Presents a comprehensive overview of responsibility to staff and students. Explains in more detail SLT role | 6 x incidences. Explains the 10 key features policy and how it informs lesson obs and SAR | 1 x incident. Student as key beneficiary - performance measures should be used as an indicator of a | 2 x incidences. Interesting response to what makes an effective teaching professional - focus on learning outcomes but also described a | 3 x incidences. Stated didn't know how many staff with SpLDs, but understood reasonable adjustments and the application of adjustments. | 5 x incidences. Described past principal as clever for introducing working parties as a way of consulting, as well as | 4 x incidences. Choosing not to follow Ofsted - creating on ten key features. Some observations on the value of residencies - spending a | 1 x incident. Focus on outcomes and outputs will take care of | 0 but linked to Heading 3. |

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| | | and acknowledges they also teach. | policy. Some reflection on the fact that they are new to role and so is the new principal they are collecting data in various ways by meeting with managers and lunches with staff to understand better what is happening and how/if they need to change existing policy/processes. Phased in unannounced lesson obs policy on the back of cultural change. Policy process in terms of external engagements with the AoC, example given - T Levels. | development need for failing teachers. | person not formula - stated teaching style might be unique to personality. On question to do with barriers - onus was placed on the teacher...if they were resistant to change and development - refusal to change- not expected of a teaching professional. | | management meetings, added caveat that groups tended not to report on stuff the principle wouldn't favour…some implied consultative agenda/directive. Also stated that SLT were tasked with consulting with organisations such as the AoC and they did so on behalf of the staff, not always possible due to time to consult staff on everything. Re - external consultation - stated 'had to be skilled' to answer question from their position that might have a different directive. | prolonged time period with a depart over one off lesson obs. T& L culture from principal to teaching staff - culture of 'buy-in' by staff although acknowledged still pockets of resistance. Interesting contradiction could be used in refer to FE lit chapter - college unable to make business decisions such as what qual to continue with, may be 'forced' to move to T Level if govt abolishes applied general - how does this fit with an incorporate independent business model?? | themselves. Linked to outcome driven lesson obs and SAR and CPD drive. | |
| Part Q Deput Chief Executive | Membership organisation | 1 x incident. Describe some detail to the role. Interestingly describe the role in a service capacity. "we are not the experts, our job is to make the expert's job easier" | 6 x incidences. Discusses formal and informal policy process stages with Ofsted. Refers to local level of policy as something | 1 x incident. Very clear the main beneficiary of performance measures are students and the teacher is ultimately | 0 | 0 | 5 x incidences. Opened with interesting observation about how is policy formulated - top, down or bottom up, describes mem as in the middle. Also | 8 x incidences. First one relates to policy - Whom is writing the policy - refers to a small elite of think tanks funded by political parties and the social class of those that are writing the policy. Ofsted problems | 4 x incidences. The output in the form of a qualification is the most | 9 x incidences. States teaching profession behind the times - if you don't deal with the individual performance of a teacher then students get let down. Performance management bar |

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| | | | open to constraints if Union's have influenced what and what is not acceptable i.e. lesson walks. Interesting point when asked if principal's represent the voice of their workforce, stated that had never been 'nailed down' - went further and stated regional principal reps - there is no way of knowing if they are only representing their own college needs - no requirement to prove wider consultation. | responsible for that. | | | states that formal consultation often has a particular directive - often they have to go beyond the categories that are set - more common with DoE - states they often consult on the detail of implementation rather than the policy direction itself. Interesting point regarding the return to linear A Level - govt would not consult on should it be returned as they already knew it would not be welcomed - would not be credible to consult on something and then go the opposite way - so you make the decision and then consult on implementation only. | are to do with their own variable inspection practice and not their policy. How membership organisations work together, AoC, SFCA, UCU etc. Fragmentation of the FE sector further with the introduction of Academy SFs. Policy technique of forcing SFC to change to Academy status by providing better benefits for those that become academies...govt award SF academy pay rises but not SFC staff. | important thing - Linked to performance - necessary to have data dimension to performance - what is the alternative? Membership organisation provide a dimension document which is based on value added measurements - states teachers not just measured on the grade but retention, destination etc. | is not that high - accepts nervousness of performance systems and hinging on grades but you have to use some form of measure. |
| Part B, HoD, | SFC | 2 x incidences. Talks in some detail about the | 4 x incidences. Talks through | 2 x incidences. In response | 2 x incidences. On question regarding what makes an | 5 x incidences. Stated no discussion | 5 x incidences. Included in consultation as | 4 x incidences. Stated that marking | 4 x incidences. | 0 |

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| teacher & E&D manager | | various tasks for each role and different pressure points throughout the year depending on the role. | the prog exam policy, 'thrashed out' between SLT and DD and then shared with HoD, no expectation or directive to seek thoughts from team members. In D&E role capacity they were not consulted on the implications for staff or students on the progression exam expectations. Acknowledged that SLT allowed for some subject differences in how they operated the policy due to subject demands. | to who is the main beneficiary for PM, stated clearly it was the government. Described the revert back to the Linear A Level as an elitist move with no consideration on how it might marginalise students will processing issues - no mention about how the same consideration could be applied to teachers. | effective teaching professional - answer focused on behavioural traits of teacher - is someone who is 'enthusiastic, caring and supportive' did also mention someone who gives good targets - but expressed some tension for a teacher to focus on outputs over outcomes. On what might prevent a teacher from being effective they stated very clearly - workload brought on by the constant amount of change in the FE sector. | regarding staff who might need additional time to mark the new progression exams …interestingly made the point that all staff were struggling - but they did acknowledge that while marking they themselves felt fatigued and they thought if I am struggling then their colleague with a suspected SpLD is likely to feel it worse. Another point of interest where they had made reasonable adjustments for a member of staff it had impacted on their own workload. | HoD but not as teacher or in their E&D capacity on matters concerning the progression exam policy and process. Some involvement in HoD/subject specialist role in the formal consultation process on the new curr with OFQAUL but not asked or aware of any E&D specialists/or learning support staff included in the consultation process. | turnaround affected all staff. Lessons obs tends to the only thing considered during observation - no other contextual reasons considered including whether reasonable adjustments have been made for affected staff. What is the ethos behind the return of the Linear A Level - states it is a return to an elitist system. Culture of support not sure that it is consistent throughout the college. | Some frustration shown at the number of times a year a students progress is measured it the form of an output, but outcomes, such as thinking skills, peer work development is not considered as there is no data to prove that - acknowledges there is a tension between the two and the expectation to focus on outputs over outcomes. | |

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| Part R - Policy Officer (Team Leader) for Curriculum DfE | Government organisation. In the Curriculum and Implementation Unit. | 3 x incidences. Stated mainly role was to provide teacher with CPD and liaised closely with policy development officers (those who run consultations), liaising with ministers and senior civil servants. Described the role as 'blurred' in-between implementation and policy. | 14 x incidences. Distinguished between formal and informal consultation and referred to two other processes 'testing the water'- going out to schools to find out what was going on - stated the result was not representative. And 'informal personal conversations' with 'personal contacts'- of the ministers - ministers will test their ideas with the contacts (also referred to by participant as 'key opinion formers'). Stated 'that is one of the key areas where policy is formed'. Described a 'pyramid hierarchy' with policy officers at the bottom - direct access to minister only via senior civil servants - there are three grades of senior civil servants. Also | 0 | 0 | 5 x incidences. In response to whether Equality Impact Assessments (EIA) were carried out as part of the consultation process - R stated they were - but stated the 'influence they had was negligible'. EIA tended to be brief and short. No systematic process and no set approach for going through different groups - R stated never saw anything about neurodiversity and teachers. | 13 x incidences. Some cross over with Heading 2 - described formal consultation process - responses are emailed in to set questions decided in advanced and approved by the minister - 'the sort of things we kind of want to do. You won't get questions saying what do you think we should do - it will be we are going to do this, how should we do it. Stated responses they don't want to enact will get 'kicked into the long grass'. Describes a constant process of informal consultation between policy officers and stakeholders in the field. States the consultations with policy officers is not as important as people think. States who are stakeholders/in | 7 x incidences. From discussions with principals R stated they would often blame the pressures from the outside - DfE policies for the reason of why they were unable to run an effective school. The impact of social media and the press on government policy was discussed R gave Windrush as an example of where the govt had to change policy they didn't want to - the DfE press office will do what they can to 'spike' stories - to make them go away. Described workforce in the DfE - senior civil servants made up of career civil servants. stated in their experience people who had a background in education were often frustrated - R described themselves as frustrated because 'something didn't feel quite right about how things worked in terms of the policy making process'. Academics were described as educationalists - this was used as a pejorative term - someone who is | 0 | 2 x incidences. In relation to discussing CPD - CPD viewed as a good thing by schools according to R but as Ofsted does not hold schools to account on the effectiveness of CPD, they focus on data that shows teachers are getting good results - this can result in CPD getting pushed out. R states the accountability framework measures it ws drives behaviour in schools and colleges. States that a principals career is driven by Ofsted, so anything else is secondary. |

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| | | | states 'social media has now a big part to play' - special advisors monitor social media to identify 'key influencers' whose ideas are align with the ministers they will often be invited in to offer advice to the minister. | | | | fluencers meeting with because that is what makes the difference in terms of effectively contributing to policy formation. | out of touch, with an axe to grind. R stated 'academic research doesn't carry any weight in policy making'. | | |

## Appendix D: Email sent to participants

Dear xxx

Re: Research on education policy and the challenges it may present for teachers with specific learning difficulties (SpLDs).

Let me begin by introducing myself. My name is Annemarie O'Dwyer, I am a doctoral research student from the University of Roehampton. I would like the opportunity to discuss my research which covers the substantive matters of education policy, teacher professionalism, and equality with you, or someone you appoint.

I taught for eleven years in the FE sector as a sociology teacher; alongside my teaching role I was also a line and middle manager. I have also been diagnosed with SpLDs. As a consequence of my own experience I have an invaluable insight into this research area and wish to make a tangible difference to FE sector institutions. I intend to use the findings of my research to produce a guidance and support information toolkit to enable FE college management to effectively support teaching staff with SpLDs.

For your information, featured below is a brief synopsis of my research, however I would be more than happy to provide further detail on request.

I wish to seek and gather the views and opinions on the benefits, purposes, expectations and challenges of education policy on teacher professionalism and equality and diversity legislation from people who work within the Further Education sector. The research intends to explore the possible tension between the Equality Act 2010, which states that reasonable adjustments should be made to support individuals with specific learning difficulties (SpLDs), while education policy around teacher professionalism continues to introduce new expectations and challenges for teachers. I am interested in whether such a tension presents any particular challenges for teachers with SpLDs.

Thank you for taking the time to read through this email.

I look forward to a response.

Kind regards,

Annemarie O'Dwyer

Doctoral Research Student

School of Education

University of Roehampton

## Appendix E: College Participant Consent Form

University of Roehampton London

**COLLEGE PARTICIPATON CONSENT FORM**

**Title of Research Project:** *An exploration of policy techniques, policy process and performativity, and the contribution they may have in the construction of teachers with Specific Learning Difficulties as subjects in the English Further Education sector.*

**Brief Description of Research Project:**

I wish to seek and gather the views and opinions on the benefits, purposes, expectations and challenges of education policy on teacher professionalism and equality and diversity legislation from people who work within the Further Education sector. The research intends to explore the possible tension between the Equality Act 2010 which states that reasonable adjustments should be made to support individuals with Specific Learning Difficulties (SpLDs), while education policy around teacher professionalism continues to introduce new expectations and challenges for teachers. I am interested in whether such a tension presents any particular challenges for teachers with SpLDs. It will be necessary to speak to a range of people within the Further Education (FE) sector, in the case of FE colleges these might be senior leaders and other members of staff with particular responsibility for teacher development and equality/diversity matters. Two Further Education colleges will be included in the sample population, it is estimated that there will be five participants from each college. An additional ten interviews will take place with participants from a range of organisations and institutions from the wider FE sector.

**What participation will include for members of staff who agree to being interviewed:**

- Participants will be asked to take part in an interview, which will be recorded using a digital Dictaphone. The interview will be approximately one hour long.
- The interviews will take place in the College during the normal times of opening.
- Participants have the right to decline to take part and the right to withdraw at any time during the research process.
- Participants will remain anonymous.
- The College will remain anonymous.
- All data gathered during this study will be held securely and anonymously.
- You have the right to withdraw your consent for the College to take part in the research at any time.

**How the findings will be disseminated:**

- The findings will be presented in a thesis which is in fulfilment of a PhD in Education.
- Findings in part or whole form may appear in academic articles and in papers presented at conferences.
- A short summary of the key findings will be shared with all participants.

**Confidentiality**

The identity of members of staff who consent to be interviewed will not be disclosed, nor will the data from individual participant interview transcripts be shared. The College will not be named.

The interview will be recorded, and transcribed with any identifying details removed. The transcript, or extracts from, may appear in my thesis and in publications (see above for more details on how the data will be disseminated) arising from it.

The interview recordings and the transcribed interview scripts will remain confidential. However there is a limit to this: if any member of staff discloses a risk of serious harm it will be necessary to seek appropriate action.

**Investigator Contact Details:**

Annemarie O'Dwyer,

School of Education,

University of Roehampton,
Roehampton Lane,
London,

SW15 5PJ.

Email: odwyera@roehampton.ac.uk

**Principal Consent Statement:**

As the Principal of [enter College name] I agree to members of the college's staff being approached to take part in the research outlined above. I am aware that as the Principal I can withdraw this consent at any point without giving a reason. I understand that the information I provide and the information provided by staff members who consent to take part in the research will be treated in confidence by the researcher and that the identity of participants will not be disclosed to me, nor will the data from individual interview transcripts be shared with me or any other representative from the College. I accept that all participants will be protected in the publication of any findings, and that data will be collected and processed in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998 and with the University's Data Protection Policy.

Name …….

Title…….

Signature …….

Date …….

Please note: if you have a concern about any aspect of your participation or any other queries please raise this with me as the investigator (or if the researcher is a student you can also contact the Director of Studies). However, if you would like to contact an independent party please contact the Deputy Director for Research in the School of Education.

| **Director of Studies Contact Details:** | **Deputy Director for Research Details:** |
|---|---|
| Dr Anthony Thorpe | Professor Andrew Stables |
| School of Education | School of Education |
| University of Roehampton | University of Roehampton |
| Roehampton Lane | Roehampton Lane |
| London SW15 5PJ | London SW15 5PJ |
| Email: a.thorpe@roehampton.ac.uk | Email: andrew.stables@roehampton.ac.uk |
| Telephone: +44 (0)20 8392 3895 | Telephone: +44 (0)20 8392 3865 |

Thank you for permitting the College to be included in the research sample population.

Yours,

*Annemarie O'Dwyer*

Doctoral Research Student

School of Education

University of Roehampton

## Appendix F: Participant Consent Form

University of Roehampton London

**PARTICIPANT CONSENT**

**Participant No.**

**Title of Research Project:** *An exploration of policy techniques, policy process and performativity, and the contribution they may have in the construction of teachers with Specific Learning Difficulties as subjects in the English Further Education sector*

**Brief Description of Research Project:**

I wish to seek and gather the views and opinions on the benefits, purposes, expectations and challenges of education policy on teacher professionalism and equality and diversity legislation from people who work within the Further Education sector. The research intends to explore the possible tension between the Equality Act 2010 which states that reasonable adjustments should be made to support individuals with Specific Learning Difficulties (SpLDs), while education policy around teacher professionalism continues to introduce new expectations and challenges for teachers. I am interested in whether such a tension presents any particular challenges for teachers with SpLDs. Two Further Education colleges will be included in the sample population, it is estimated that there will be five participants from each college. An additional ten interviews will take place with participants from a range of organisations and institutions from the wider FE sector.

**What participation involves:**

- You will be asked to take part in an interview, which will be recorded using a digital Dictaphone. The interview will be approximately one hour long.
- The interviews will take place at your place of employment, unless you prefer an alternative location.
- You have the right to decline to take part and the right to withdraw at any time during the research process.
- You and the organisation you work for will remain anonymous in any findings or publications.
- All data gathered during this study will be held securely and anonymously. If you wish to be withdrawn from the study, contact me with your participation number and all information relating to you will be deleted from my files.

**How the findings will be disseminated:**

- The findings will be presented in a thesis which is in fulfilment of a PhD in Education.

- Findings in part or whole form may appear in academic articles and in papers presented at conferences.
- A short summary of the key findings will be shared with all participants.

**Confidentiality**

The interview will be recorded, and transcribed with any identifying details removed. The transcript, or extracts from, may appear in my thesis and in publications (see above for more details on how the data will be disseminated) arising from it.

The interview recordings and the transcribed interview scripts will remain confidential and will not be shared with anyone else. However there is a limit to this: if you disclose a risk of serious harm it will be necessary to seek appropriate action.

**Investigator Contact Details:**

Annemarie O'Dwyer,

School of Education,

University of Roehampton,
Roehampton Lane,
London,

SW15 5PJ.

Email: odwyera@roehampton.ac.uk

**Consent Statement:**

I, the participant, agree to take part in the research, and am aware that I am free to withdraw at any point without giving a reason. I understand that the information I provide will be treated in confidence by the researcher and that my identity and that of my organisation will be protected in the publication of any findings, and that data will be collected and processed in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998 and with the University's Data Protection Policy.

Name ……

Signature …….

Date …….

Please note: if you have a concern about any aspect of your participation or any other queries please raise this with me as the investigator (or if the researcher is a student you can also

contact the Director of Studies). However, if you would like to contact an independent party please contact the Deputy Director for Research in the School of Education.

| **Director of Studies Contact Details:** | **Deputy Director for Research Details:** |
|---|---|
| Dr Anthony Thorpe | Professor Andrew Stables |
| School of Education | School of Education |
| University of Roehampton | University of Roehampton |
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| Telephone: +44 (0)20 8392 3895 | Telephone: +44 (0)20 8392 3865 |

Thank you for consenting to take part in my research.

Yours,

*Annemarie O'Dwyer*

Doctoral Research Student

School of Education

## Appendix G: Ethics Approval

The research for this project was submitted for ethics consideration under the reference EDU 16/ 121 in the Department of Education and was approved under the procedures of the University of Roehampton's Ethics Committee on 16.01.17.

## Appendix H: Participant Debrief Form

University of Roehampton

**PARTICIPANT DEBRIEF**

**Participant No.**

**Title of Research Project:** *An exploration of policy techniques, policy process and performativity, and the contribution they may have in the construction of teachers with Specific Learning Difficulties as subjects in the English Further Education sector*

Thank you very much for taking part in my study, I greatly appreciate your contribution.

This study is designed to examine the factors that are associated with the benefits, purposes and expectations of performativity policy and how they might present challenges for teachers with Specific Learning Difficulties (SpLDs), from the perspective of key policy actors, and your participation is extremely valuable.

All data gathered during this study will be held securely and anonymously. If you wish to withdraw from the study, contact us with your participant number (above) and your information will be deleted from our files.

If you have a concern about any aspect of your participation or any other queries please raise this with me as the investigator (or if the researcher is a student you can also contact the Director of Studies). However, if you would like to contact an independent party please contact the Deputy Director for Research in the School of Education.

**Investigator:**
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# List of Tables

**Table 1.** Table of Research Participants 88